Experiencing Heritage:
Making Sense of Industrial Heritage Tourism

by

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A thesis submitted to the University of Bristol, through Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education, in accordance with the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Geography, September, 1999.

Abstract

The study connects two current debates in geography, on the politics of representation (the 'cultural turn') and the production and consumption of heritage. The thesis argues that, at present, heritage discourse is in a state of polarised suspension, in need of advancement. There has been a neglect of the voices of those who work within the heritage 'industry' (those who write museum 'texts') and of those who are receptive to these representations of the past. In recognition of such absences, the thesis lends empirical weight, via a qualitative study, to those who seek to challenge the polarity of heritage discourse. Moreover, the thesis unpacks the mediated nature of representations of times past through an examination of three perceived 'bases to authenticity' where 'truth' is said to reside: the built environment, oral history and expert history. The contours of this mediation are drawn out to illustrate how representations of the past are social and cultural constructs. Advancing an understanding of the complexities inherent in the writing and reading of representations of the past, I reject traditional 'consumption' theories, arguing that they are too simplistic to unpack the contours of the producer/consumer relationship. Instead I draw on Becker's (1982) model of the 'art world'. I argue and demonstrate that 'cultural conventions' are operating within museums and heritage themed attractions which guide and shape the construction of meaning in the process of experiencing heritage.

For
M. and J. Baldwin

I would like to thank Dr Caroline Mills, Professor Peter Jackson and Mr Andrew Charlesworth for all their help and advice during the course of this study.

Author's Declaration

The work contained in this thesis is a product of the author's own work and is not the result of anything done in collaboration. The views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and do not represent the views of Cheltenham & Gloucester College of Higher Education, or the University of Bristol.

Signed: Jebaral Baldo Date: 17/1/00

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Abbreviations:

MLL	Museum of Liverpool Life
NMGM	National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside
QBM	Quarry Bank Mill
WP	Wigan Pier

Photographs:

Chapter 1: Introduction

> '...within written works an author's intentions and the meaning of the text often cease to coincide ... the text escapes its author' (Barnes and Duncan, 1992: 6).

1.1 Introduction to the study

Barnes and Duncan use an expanded view of 'text' (to include various 'cultural productions such as paintings, maps and landscapes, as well as social, economic and political institutions' (1992: 5)) to unpack contemporary concerns in geography regarding the politics of representation. In particular, Barnes and Duncan highlight the tension that exists between representation (the *writing* of the text) and reception (the *reading* of the text): the meaning constructed in representation is not necessarily the same meaning received or interpreted by the audience. In other words, meaning is produced by the reader, not the writer. In this study, I demonstrate how such a 'tension' is also an issue for museums and heritage themed attractions. As socio-cultural institutions containing heritage landscapes, these 'sites of representation' (Duncan, 1993) produce writings of times past for public consumption (or 'reading'). Furthermore, commentators on this relationship (the so-called 'heritage debate') cast the authors of such 'texts' as merely producing bogus, inauthentic representations; those who read (consume) such texts are viewed as gullible, deluded and passive victims. However, such criticisms sound hollow when it is apparent that they lack substantiating empirical evidence, as Urry (1996) has recently noted, little is known of visitors 'use and response' to these representations of times past. By drawing on key aspects of Barnes and Duncan's (1992) portrayal of the problems

of representation, in particular, the assertion that 'authors' cannot control or influence the reading of their 'texts', I investigate, through a qualitative study, the representation and reception of heritage. I examine those who are involved in the production of representations of bygone times and evaluate visitor responses to such representations. Moreover, I consider how visitors (as consumers) are also producers, as it is in the process of reading museum 'texts' where meaning is constructed. By accessing these voices, the dimensions that shape the experiencing of heritage are unpacked, revealing the *way(s)* these representations are experienced and at the same time moving heritage discourse forward.

1.2 Overview of the empirical study

The research has used the Museum of Liverpool Life (MLL) at the Albert Dock, Liverpool; Wigan Pier (WP), Wigan; and Quarry Bank Mill (QBM), Styal, Cheshire as case study sites. Investigating the production and consumption of heritage has required an examination of both the construction of museum 'texts' (*how* they are written) and the experiencing of such 'texts' (*how* they are read by the audience). As such a variety of qualitative research methods have been undertaken in this study (see Chapter 3 for full details) including in-depth interviews, focus groups, participant observation and questionnaire surveys.

1.3 Summary of the argument

My current dissatisfaction with the 'heritage debate' is explained in Chapter 2 as I demonstrate how it has seemingly become a polarised and static debate, overly critical of those who construct and visit museums and heritage attractions,

without actually offering on-the-ground evidence to justify such claims. Furthermore, documenting the empirical weaknesses of contemporary heritage discourse illustrates how this current study can provide some answers to these absences. Having discussed the key problems rooted in this present debate, the chapter then unpacks culture and heritage as contested concepts to suggest that as they are slippery, malleable terms, not easily defined and being open to a plethora of interpretations, they pose difficulties for any attempts at their representation. Such an argument allows a platform to be established from which broader ideas circulating representation can be examined. Understanding the theorisation of representation is important to this study as it provides a clear context from which the production and consumption of museums and heritage attractions (as offering *representations of the past*) can be scrutinised later in the thesis, when the 'writing' of the past (Chapter 5) and the 'reading' of these representations (Chapter 6) are critically evaluated.

The research methods utilised in this qualitative study are identified in Chapter 3, where the practicalities and difficulties encountered during the course of this field study are also outlined. For example, the modifications made to the application of the participant observation method of enquiry are detailed and explained. The chapter also provides an introduction to each of the sites used in the study, noting their place on the 'heritage spectrum' and highlighting the need for an awareness of the different 'types' of heritage themed attractions available for public consumption. An important argument made in this chapter is concerning the need for a more sensitive treatment and use of the term 'ethnography'. In this study, I

explore the notion of museums being 'ethnographies' in terms of how they offer (or write) representations of people's lives, histories and places. This study has been conducted using 'classic' ethnographic research methods such as participant observation and in-depth interviewing, however, I argue that I have *not* conducted an ethnography of the production and consumption of heritage: I stress that it is a *qualitative* study. This distinction is made because even though the term 'ethnography' is becoming used more widely (and interchangeably) in the social sciences, I do not feel the nature and approach of the field research conducted here can be compared to for example, traditional (classic) anthropological ethnographies, which have involved complete immersion in places for many years, in an attempt to gain an understanding of the ways of life and culture of the people who live there.

In Chapter 4 I suggest that museums are 'sites of representation' which make claims for portraying the truth. I argue that within museums there are three potential sources of 'truth': the built environment, oral history and 'expert' history. These three sources of 'truth' are examined in relation to various theories of representation. I demonstrate how each source of truth is conditioned and argue that this mediation renders *all* sources of 'truth' as adhering to the 'constructionist' theory of representation. This connection is explored in greater detail in Chapter 5 where the construction and performance of two museum 'texts' are analysed. The chapter centres upon examining the tensions that exist in the production of representations of the past for public consumption and understanding. For example, the notion of 'storying the self' through personal

narrative is discussed and I consider how such storying fits into the production of representations of the past. The notion of performance is explored as the experience of performing the past for public consumption is deconstructed.

In Chapter 6 attention turns to the readings of these museum 'texts'. To make sense of the reception of heritage representations, I argue that production and consumption need to be reconciled and integrated, rather than being treated as separate entities. I explain and demonstrate how 'traditional' theories of consumption (the 'mass culture critique' and the 'pleasures of consumption' view) have proved unsatisfactory in attempts at extracting the nuanced nature of the writings and readings of heritage. To this end, in light of the limitations of this traditional view, I argue that an understanding of the complexities of the experiencing of representations of the past can be found in the work of Howard Becker (1982) and Ruth Finnegan (1997a). Here, I advance the notion that museums can be considered as an 'art world' which consists of a 'collaborative network' of people (including curators, demonstrators and visitors) where a set of (often unconsciously) recognised and accepted 'cultural conventions' operate to influence and guide the behaviour of those who participate in this 'network'.

1.4 Summary

In this thesis I have used qualitative research methods to obtain empirical evidence to challenge the 'sneering' voices within heritage discourse. I have argued that in order to present an understanding of how consumers make sense of representations of bygone times, it is necessary to address the issue of how

representations of the past are constructed. I identified and exemplified three potential sources of 'truth' inherent in the writing of museum 'texts': artefacts, oral history and expert endeavours. Each of these sources of truth found common ground with the 'constructionist' theory of representation as I uncovered evidence to support the notion that all museum representations are mediated and conditioned. The case studies presented in Chapter 5 make this clear.

At the outset, the findings from this study challenge the 'cultural dupe' thesis (a dominant theme circulating heritage discourse), however, whilst evidence of more active, engaged and empowered visitors is clearly visible in the qualitative data, this position is itself splintered. For example, the issue of heritage sites producing 'artefactual history' (cf. Urry, 1990) - cleansed versions of the past - can still provoke, in visitors who have lived through those times (and who would rather forget about them), memories which are far from cleansed. The study rejects traditional consumption theory as it is unable to tap into the more nuanced and complex relations circulating the production and consumption of heritage.

Positioning museums as 'art worlds' advanced the notion that museums consisted of 'collaborative networks' where the behaviour of participants within such networks is unconsciously shaped by the operation of 'cultural conventions'. I argue that as museums can be deemed 'ethnographies', involved in the material writing of history, the conventions circulating within these cultural institutions can be labelled 'tropes' (Clifford, 1986), as they give meaning to the processes shaping museum visiting. Analysing the findings from the qualitative data I have

located five core conventions or 'tropes' which underpin the experiencing of heritage: museums as 'activity spaces'; 'social interaction'; 'identity'; 'learning' and 'performance'. Each trope is examined in Chapter 6.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework

'Reverence for the past is commonly seen to inhibit change, embargo progress, dampen optimism, stifle creativity' (Lowenthal, 1985: 65).

'All towns can pretend to some sort of history, so on this level all towns may be transformed into tourist attractions. There is no need for striking sites or magnificent views: the most filthy, boring, ugly and unhealthy industrial town now has a reason to pull in the tourists, promising an escape from present woes and troubles through the elegantly simple device of timetravel. Even a piece of waste ground can become an attraction if a story can be attached to it' (Corrigan, 1997: 133).

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I unpack the 'web of interpretation' (Ley and Olds, 1992: 181) cast by scholars over society's relationship to representations of the past. The chapter opens by suggesting that heritage discourse is in a state of suspension, and that this has been caused by the increasing *polarisation* of the heritage debate. This polarity is exemplified through an exploration of the notion of heritage as either the 'cause' or 'cure' for society's present day 'ills'. Through this example, I draw out the implications of such polarisation on the heritage discourse, for instance, suggesting that the emphasis on the cause/cure dichotomy has channelled attention away from detailed empirical investigations of those who produce and consume representations of the past. Finally, the chapter turns to consider the conceptual tools that have framed this study, in particular unpacking the theorisation of 'representation'.

2.2 Heritage in suspension

The presence of 'the past in contemporary society' (Fowler, 1992) persists as a focus for scholarly comment and debate, as recent books by Tunbridge and Ashworth (1996) and Lowenthal (1997) bear testimony. Despite this attention to

representations of the past, the heritage debate has lost its way in recent years, becoming jaded and static, neither finding 'new' ground to explore, nor offering exciting or challenging perspectives on 'old' arguments and problems.

The voices heard within the heritage debate have tended to focus on three areas. First, there has been a concern for describing and interpreting *what* has been offered for public understanding and consumption as 'the past'. In this respect, representations of the past have largely been derided by the 'heritage-baiters' (Samuel, 1994) for being inauthentic, sanitised, kitschy pastiches of the past: 'bogus history', in Hewison's words (1987). Other voices in the debate have settled on trying to ascertain *who* is responsible for producing such representations. Here, conclusions have ranged from the 'salesmen' (sic) and the 'new 'breed' of heritage-managers', (Hewison, 1987; 1989, respectively) that have emerged as the past has been transformed into another part of the tourism industry. Wright (1989) notes that such critics have failed to pay attention to the actual day-to-day activities of the museum professionals responsible for interpreting 'heritage' for public understanding. Finally, the debate has also tried to discover *why* there has been such an interest in the past (Lowenthal, 1997). To this end, explanations have included 'heritage' as an income generator via cultural tourism strategies and policies (Bianchini and Parkinson, 1993). In this context, the 'bread and circus' analogy has been applied: the past being presented, packaged and promoted by society's powerful elite groups as a spectacular diversion in order to shift the attention of the 'masses' away from more worrying matters, such as economic decline (Harvey, 1989). For some, an interest in the

past is seen as indicative of the response of a 'sick' society to the failings of the present time: the past viewed as safe, secure and often as a 'better' time than now (cf. Lowenthal, 1985; 1989, on the nostalgic impulse). These explanations suggest that those who consume such representations of the past are both gullible and deluded (Fowler, 1992).

The debate has tended to be repetitive, failing to move beyond these three themes. In fact, on the basis of such writings, the consensus suggests a strong adherence to wider notions of the 'mass culture critique' (cf. Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979; Negus, 1997; Mackay, 1997) who argue that those drawn as consumers to heritage sites and attractions (as components of the 'culture industry') unquestioningly absorb all that is placed before them: '... cultural consumption [as] a deconcentrated activity leading to passive and 'obedient' types of social behaviour' (Negus, 1997: 73).

Wright (1989) called for a moratorium on such writings that were frequently appearing in the media, arguing that they did nothing to further the heritage discourse. It has been stressed that the focus of the heritage debate has been on the *production* of heritage themed attractions and on the reasons why such heritage strategies have been adopted (Kearns and Philo, 1993). In contrast, little attention has been given to the *consumers* of such attractions, except for the 'counting visitors' approach (cf. Hooper-Greenhill, 1988). Moreover, when the lens of inquiry has been turned on to the consumers of heritage, it has tended to

have the same critical flavour as accounts on the production of the past (Wright, 1989).

In Reas and Cosgrove's (1993), *'Flogging A Dead Horse: Heritage Culture and its Role in Post-Industrial Britain'* attention focuses on the consumers of heritage attractions. Their study consists of a series of photographic images captured by Reas, of visitors to heritage attractions in England and Wales. A commentary on these images, by Cosgrove, is woven through the book. Cosgrove suggests that the photographs reflect post-industrial society's satisfaction with consuming a mythologised version of the past, cast as 'hyper-history'. Reas's photographs include images of visitors milling around the heritage sites and gazing on the displays, as well as images of tourists themselves taking their own photographs of the displays, artefacts and exhibitions. Samuel (1994) maintains that through photographs the authors have critiqued public interest in (and behaviour at) sites representing the past, turning consumers of heritage into a spectacle. Samuel (1994:264, my emphasis) describes some of the photographs in Reas and Cosgrove's (1993) book:

> 'The Northern Experience at Beamish Hall, County Durham, is represented by a middle-aged man *squinting* uncomfortably through the eyepiece of a camera ... [on] an open-topped bus tour of Liverpool's Albert Dock, two elderly ladies *gawp* ... At Wigan Pier Heritage Centre a young boy with a Mickey Mouse tee-shirt *watches* a pit-brow girl pushing a coal-wagon'.

Samuel states that the anti-heritage ethos of this book is blatantly reinforced through manipulating the camera's gaze to construct 'repellent' images: 'objects and viewers are juxtaposed so as to diminish the one and belittle the other' (1994:264). The consumers of heritage have been made into figures to laugh at,

to sneer at - the ridicule produced through manipulating angles and lighting. It is noted that 'we are never once shown the objects [that visitors have come to see] - they exist as a kind of mocking commentary on the *sightseers*' (ibid., my emphasis). Reas and Cosgrove's (1993) interpretation of the heritage industry illustrates the powerful nature of the critics' authoritarian gaze over the consumers of heritage. The opportunity to counteract these images is absent; the visitors portrayed in the pictures ultimately remain silent.

Reas and Cosgrove's (1993) study connects with dominant themes circulating through the 'mass culture critique'. The Frankfurt School's 'mass culture critique' (cf. Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979; du Gay, Hall et al, 1997; Negus 1997) centred on the role (and impact) of advertising following the growth of mass production in the 20th Century (Mackay, 1997). In the search for maximising profits, it was argued that advertising was used as a tool to encourage greater consumption by constructing images and marketing strategies intent on cultivating '"false" needs' (Mackay, 1997:3). Such a perspective advanced the notion of ideological control and the homogenisation of society. Ultimately, as Mackay concedes, the 'mass culture critique' placed 'consumers [in] a profoundly passive role, portraying them as manipulated, mindless dupes, rather than as active and creative beings' (ibid.). Negus (1997) suggests that the mass culture view has been critiqued as being out of date, (merely a product of its time) however, Negus demonstrates through using the example of the behaviour and activities of the Sony Corporation, how issues of homogenisation and control over cultural production still have contemporary relevance.

The 'mass culture critique' finds its expression within heritage discourse in the notion of heritage consumers as 'cultural dupes'. 'Landscapes of leisure' (Warren, 1993) are claimed to present 'the persistent fantasy that it is possible to step back into the past' (Hewison, 1987:83; see also Tivers, 1997) and the popularity of the 'heritage industry' is seen as indicative of consumer satisfaction with these fantasises (cf. Reas and Cosgrove, 1993). Fowler (1989; 1992) voices concern for those who, in stepping out of this fantasy, leave the heritage attraction and go home believing that they now know what life was really like in other times. Fowler blames the museum professionals for this delusion as they give visitors such empathetic impressions. Blame is also placed on the visitors themselves for believing the claims of these so-called 'heritage feelies' (1989:62).

It has not gone unnoticed that the visitor has largely been neglected in debates on heritage. In 1989, Patrick Wright appealed for 'audience and use' research to be undertaken, and in recent years, studies to emerge have included Crang (1995) and Bagnall (1996). If the heritage debate *is* to move beyond this state of suspension then the authoritarianism must be wavered; as Mellor (1991:100) concedes, '[we] forgot to ask the punters what they think ... [we assume] that others share our disorientation and deracination'. In 1984, Horne (cited in Wright, 1985: 80) asked us to consider, '[r]ather than sneering at the much abused figure of the tourist ... we should instead be considering whether all those millions can really be mistaken in their enthusiasms?' Instead of lodging the debate within a deeply critical vein, Horne suggests that we should look at the nature of this popularity. As such, both Horne and Wright have advocated a consideration of

the consumers of such heritage experiences: *who* visited, *why* and *what* they got out of such encounters. More recently, John Urry (1996) has commented that little is known about how visitors use and respond to representations of the past.

One of the main outcomes of neglecting visitors' voices has been that the critic's authoritarian gaze has remained unchallenged. Hewison (1987), for example, seems to suggest that visitors to heritage attractions *passively* accept all the displays and information put before them. For Hewison, '[t]he actors of Wigan Pier demonstrate that we do not merely wish to recall the past, buy souvenirs of the past or build and decorate our homes in past styles: we actually want to live in the past' (1987:31). Is this the case? With little attention paid to *how* people consume heritage, it has been difficult to find challenges to these grand and unsubstantiated claims. What are the *positive* outcomes associated with consuming the past? By concentrating on the presumed negative aspects (cf. Lowenthal, 1985), Hewison and the other critics have missed this opportunity to explore the different ways in which the presence of the past is consumed, experienced or regarded in the present. In recognition of these silences, this current study shifts the focus of enquiry back to the gaze of the consumers themselves, and offers some empirical evidence to examine the multiple ways that the past is consumed.

Warren (1993:183) notes that the few studies conducted on the consumption of popular culture, such as on shopping malls (Fiske, 1989) or Disneyland (Real, 1977) have indicated that amongst consumers there is 'resistance,

misinterpretation, evasion and distortion as well as acceptance'. Analysing public response to Vancouver's 1986 World's Fair, Ley and Olds (1988; 1992) found the majority of respondents clearly opposed the 'dupe' thesis as they were able to separate fantasy from reality. For Ley and Olds, consumers understood what was going on and willingly suspended (bracketed out) their disbelief. In strengthening opposition to the 'dupe' thesis visitors experienced the Fair as an opportunity to have fun, consolidate family ties and community bonding, as well as promoting 'mutual learning'. As Ley and Olds (1988:209) conclude from their study, 'cultural dupes posed by mass culture theorists are less visible on the ground than they are in nonempirical speculation'. Clearly, Ley and Olds demonstrate the fractured and moreover, *positive* outcomes associated with the consumption of mass culture. Rather than adopting the mass culture thesis, therefore, their study has some resonance with the 'pleasures of consumption' school of thought (de Certeau, 1984; Fiske, 1989; 1989a; Mackay, 1997) in which consumers are deemed to have a much more active and engaging role in the consumption process. The current study also highlights the active and empowered experiences of visitors at heritage sites.

In collecting evidence on the experiences of consuming representations of the past, it is also necessary to *re-examine* what has been produced as representations of the past. Here, it is necessary to acknowledge that there different *types* of museums and heritage themed attractions produced by museum professionals and available for public consumption. Such heritage typologies can be placed along a 'spectrum' where for instance, museums which portray more recent history

(within living memory, such as the Museum of Liverpool Life used in this current study) feature at one end of the spectrum. Museums and heritage attractions claiming to portray more distant epochs or histories such as the Bannockburn Heritage Centre, Stirling, or the Jorvik Viking Museum, York, can be placed, at intervals, further along the spectrum. In this way, the 'spectrum' sifts through and categorises the diverse types of heritage sites available for visitors to experience. Moreover, the spectrum also highlights how the *reception* of these representations will be different according to the site's 'position' on the spectrum. For instance, reliance on curatorial interpretations is reduced when the focus of the museum is on events, people and places within living memory. In contrast, visitors to museums featuring for example, Vikings or other 'distant' topics would rely more on curatorial attempts to make sense of these times which are far beyond the scope of living memory.

One must look at *who* has produced such representations and *how* they have been constructed; in this sense, this current study addresses familiar issues, but again gives them a new focus: the actual voices of those who *work* within such heritage attractions (cf. Wright, 1989). Urry (1990) identifies two 'classes' of service sector employee: those with minimal direct contact with consumers (for example, a chef) and those with a higher degree of contact (such as, waiting staff). This distinction can also be applied to those who work in heritage attractions where for instance, curators have limited direct contact with visitors, in contrast to the demonstrators and role players, for whom direct encounters with the public constitute their routinised, everyday working lives. This distinction signals how

curatorial staff, whilst responsible for *producing* museum displays and exhibitions, themselves 'step back' from the public gaze, to allow their exhibitions to be 'peopled' by others who essentially *re*produce heritage experiences within them (for example, acting out scenes or demonstrating skills) for public consumption. Drawing on Philip Crang's (1997) theorising of tourism employment through the use of 'performative metaphors' I examine the performance of these public roles in reproducing heritage experiences for visitors.

Moreover, the study problematises and re-evaluates the notion of 'producer' by asking *who* are the 'producers'? Is this the sole responsibility of the curators and demonstrators or do 'consumers' have roles to play in the production of meanings from their experiences? These ideas are connected by a common thread: the argument that museums are a 'text' to be 'read' and interpreted by visitors (as consumers) to produce meaning. This argument makes up part of the wider debate circulating the social sciences regarding 'representation' and the notion that the author's endeavours (to represent) are superseded by the audience's response ('reading') (cf. Barnes and Duncan, 1992).

2.3 A polarised debate

In the previous section I suggested that the heritage debate had fallen into a state of 'suspension'. I would also argue that the heritage discourse has become increasingly polarised. A series of polar oppositions can be detected in the literature on heritage; examples include whether representations of the past are seen as 'good' (history) or 'bad'(heritage); authentic or inauthentic; as portraying

grassroots/'popular' history or the history of the 'elites'. Here I bring such oppositions together for closer scrutiny through a detailed examination of heritage and the medical metaphor: the cause or cure dichotomy.

At the root of the heritage debate lies the notion that contemporary society is suffering from some 'sickness': the illness of decline (Hewison, 1987). There is a sense that since the Second World War, the progressivism promised by both Conservative and Labour governments has failed to be sustained or, for some sectors in society, to materialise at all (Wright, 1985; Hewison, 1987). This 'illness' of decline has become more acute in recent years, often perceived as culminating in 'moral panics' (McRobbie, 1994). Labour's election victory in May 1997 prompted some media speculation that this change in governmental power was a national 'tonic' (cf. Seddon and Cooper, 1997). To this end, if the 'illness' of decline thesis persists, where does 'heritage' fit into this sickly scenario? Is the past perceived as a certain, secure and stable remedy for such panic attacks? Or is this 'presence of the past' a lingering virus which accentuates contemporary anxieties? Both these interpretations of heritage's role in a changing world can be identified in the literature. These interpretations can be examined through the continuing use of the 'medical' metaphor: is heritage the cause or cure for contemporary ills?

i. Heritage as the cure: the conservative ideology

A discursive theme woven through the literature promotes the remedial qualities of heritage as the cultural cure for society's maladies. The conservative ideology

uses heritage as a tonic for contemporary society's anxious condition through appealing to past times as exemplars of great and glorious events which signify 'Deep England' (Wright, 1985). The discourse of traditional 'Deep England' emerged from the idea that a simple, pastoral country lifestyle existed; the notion of the 'rural idyll' was perpetuated through the alleged harmonious agrarian relations between the 'squires' and farm labourers (Thrift, 1989). Reverence for pastoral bygone times has persisted in the political rhetoric of various Conservative leaders and MPs who have drawn upon the traditional agrarian lifestyle of Britain/England as a spirited example and 'rallying cry' (Samuel, 1992:12) used in times of perceived threat and danger, decline and anxiety. For example, Stanley Baldwin explains what England means to him:

> '... England comes to me through my various senses - through the ear, through the eye, and through certain imperishable scents... The sounds of England, the tinkle of the hammer on the anvil in the country smithy... the sound of the scythe against the whetstone, and the sight of a hill, the sight that has been seen in England since England was a land, and may be seen in England long after the Empire has perished and every works in England has ceased to function, for centuries the one eternal sight of England ... and above all, most subtle, most penetrating and most moving, the smell of wood smoke coming up in an autumn evening, or the smell of scutch fires: that wood smoke that our ancestors, tens of thousands of years ago, must have caught on the air when they were coming home with the results of a day's forage...' (1926, in Giles and Middleton (eds.), 1995:101).

Baldwin expresses a desire for such 'things that make England ...[to] be the inheritance of *every child born into this country* ...' (ibid.: 102, my emphasis). Hence, Baldwin's sensory use of the past is enriched with the notion of harmonious agrarian continuity which must survive as the next generation's heritage. Moreover, his ideology is also exclusionary (i.e. to those *foreign* born). This slant poses interesting and challenging opportunities for my research, pointing to the way in which representations of the past are exclusionary, contested and therefore political. In these supposedly postmodern times

(recognising and including *all* voices), can such exclusionary ideologies persist? I address how 'exclusion' is manifest in the production of representations of the past and explore the reception of these 'exclusionary' representations: who do they affect? I examine the implications of such practices for any attempt to advance an understanding of museum consumption.

Margaret Thatcher's rallying cry for the 1983 election campaign, 'Victorian Values', served as 'a rhetorical trope which seemed to both thematise her causes and to give them *retrospective* dignity' (Samuel, 1992:12, my emphasis). Under this banner, Thatcher was able amongst other things to profess her support for 'old-fashioned' values and a restoration of the 'authority principle' in the face of moral anarchy. For Thatcher, the Victorian Age represented progressivism as well as providing a constructive and improving mandate for the 'ordinary person' (Samuel, 1992:11). Thatcher used the Falklands War to mobilise a sense of national history and give the Conservative Party credence and popular support following the economic failings and high unemployment 'at home': '[the] lesson of the Falklands is that Britain has not changed and that this nation still has those sterling qualities which shine through our history' (Thatcher, cited in Corner and Harvey, 1991:10). Clearly, Thatcher utilised the past as a diverting strategy.

In Margaret Thatcher's lexicon 'the past' is a double-edged sword; whilst she encouraged people to return to 'Victorian values', courted popular support for the raising of the Mary Rose and spouted nationalist sentiment to justify the Falklands war, she continued to attack the Labour Party regarding trade unionism

and strike action, believing that such activities were backward looking and would plunge the country into a 'museum society' (Wright, 1985). Yet, mass unemployment resulting from strategies intent on rationalising industry to make it more competitive in a global economy, was, in Thatcher's view, preferable to 'living in the nostalgic glories of a previous industrial revolution' (1976 cited in Samuel, 1992:10). In this respect being old-fashioned was clearly associated with regressivism: 'to be 'old-fashioned' is to be an impediment to social recovery' (Wright, 1985:152). In reply, Labour reminded society about the shortcomings of the Victorian era: '...each man [sic] for himself and the devil take the hindmost. Some [Labour politicians] invoked the spectre of the workhouse, some of child labour, some of the Dickensian slum' (Samuel, 1992:13). Urry (1996) has noted John Major's endeavour to perpetuate the traditional conservative ideology. Major's rhetorical vision included Sunday afternoons playing cricket on the village green, drinking warm beer and watching 'old maids' bicycling to church. Clearly, politicians draw on a plurality of pasts to suit their own arguments and positions. The 'malleability' (Lowenthal, 1985) of heritage is evident in such political ideologies: the past open to multiple interpretations. The research steps outside politicians' uses of the past to look at how this notion of 'plurality' manifests itself in representations of the past that have been produced for public consumption and understanding.

The conservative political agenda has embraced the commercial benefits connected to the promotion of the past. As Lowenthal states: '[n]othing nowadays sells so well as the past' (1989:22). Harvey (1989) explores the

remedial qualities of heritage associated with the quest for urban regeneration. Local governments have adopted innovative and entrepreneurial methods in their attempts to secure inward capital investment, recognising the role and importance of consumption to the recovery process. Harvey (1989) notes the mushrooming of public-private partnerships which were consolidated around highly speculative and risky schemes such as cultural, entertainment and retail complexes. Such schemes targeted the so-called 'discriminating' and 'conspicuous' consumer power said to exist even in times of economic recession. It was thought that these projects cast 'a seemingly beneficial shadow over the whole metropolitan region' (Harvey, 1989:8). Harvey documents the ease with which places could adopt such revitalising approaches by suggesting that localities all have at their disposal a marketable heritage (such as industrial or maritime heritage) that could be used to compete for mobile capital flows. Through the consumption of heritage attractions, tourist revenue is drawn into the locality, the attraction also providing a promotional tool for the image-makers (Sadler, 1993). The resultant inter-urban competition has required the construction of urban images to sell these places. Sadler has commented on how such images are often based on 'real or imagined cultural traditions' (1993:180). Whilst aiming to secure economic benefits regarding the 'lure' of capital, these images also have 'internal social and political consequences', namely that such visions were seen to 'counteract the sense of anomie and alienation' associated with contemporary city living and promoted a sense of attachment and belonging to the locale: 'to provide a mental refuge in world that capital treats as more and more place-less' (Harvey, 1989:14). Harvey compares these image/spectacle creating practices to the 'Roman formula' of

'bread and circuses' as diverting and pacifying strategies (cf. Ley and Olds, 1988; 1992). The notion of heritage as distraction is a persistent theme woven through the heritage debate. The idea that people are in some way *distracted* from the present by images of the past, connects with the 'bread and circus' mass culture thesis (Adorno and Horkheimer, 1979; Brantlinger, 1983).

Harvey cites the Arts Council of Great Britain's ideology, namely that the investment in arts and cultural events provides a 'climate of optimism' and promotes a 'can-do' ethos which are both fundamental to the establishment of an 'enterprise culture' (1989:9). Clearly, the role of heritage is central to local government's cultural policies designed to create economic regeneration through consumption. This strategy is intent on exploiting society's desire to consume particular images, goods and services along with particular ways of thinking and behaving which encourage and reinforce class cohesion. Here, it could be argued that these cultural policies are the 'mass culture' thesis at work, providing cultural manipulation and control, however, these strategies are more complex as they appeal to particular groups of people and target their particular dispositions or weaknesses. In this way, heritage as distraction contrasts with another view: heritage as social distinction (Bourdieu, 1984; Veblen, 1899).

As more strands of society began to engage in consumption practices, Corrigan noted how the need to display pecuniary strength and accordingly social honour amongst the super rich became more and more acute: often having to be learned ('cultivation of the aesthetic faculty' (Veblen, 1899)) (Corrigan, 1997: 24). For

Veblen, 'wealth' or pecuniary strength was demonstrated in two ways: through conspicuous leisure and through conspicuous consumption (Corrigan, 1997:21). In a similar vein, Bourdieu's (1984) work has also drawn attention to the importance of 'taste' and symbolic goods which signify prestige, status and social standing. In contrast to Veblen's focus on the overt display of wealth, however, Bourdieu highlighted the more subtle and inconspicuous dimensions of a 'Kantian aesthetic' whereby immediate pleasure is forgone in favour of a more cultivated appropriation of goods and experiences (Miller, 1987). According to Miller, Bourdieu considered education as 'generat[ing] distinctions based on merit rather than birth or wealth' (1987: 151). Bourdieu noted a link between the length of time spent in higher education and the likelihood of individuals visiting museums and art galleries (Miller, 1987). For Bourdieu, having the ability to understand abstract modern art was seen as a form of social distinction acquired through education (Miller, 1987).

Whilst Bourdieu's study has advanced a 'class analysis to the realm of consumption', it lacks an appreciation of the significance of other social divisions: 'gender, 'race', or generation' are not examined' (Mackay, 1997: 5). Moreover, it treats social class as given: 'in the end what he is doing is applying to consumption patterns a class analysis which is derived from the realm of production; in this sense he is, despite his focus on consumption - following the conventional wisdom, in which consumption is largely secondary and determined activity' (ibid.).

Perhaps surprisingly, Bourdieu's key empirical work on class and consumption employed an extensive questionnaire survey. Thus, as Miller points out, the account fails to reveal: 'the actual brilliance often displayed in the art of living in modern society by people of all classes, and the use of ambiguities, inconsistencies, resistance, framing and such devices in individual and social strategies' (Miller, 1987: 155). Nevertheless, his ideas have provided an important source for more recent work on the construction and reproduction of cultural capital within the processes of class formation and distinction. In the field of cultural geography, for instance, Thrift (1989) has shown how a new class fraction, the 'service class', makes a claim for distinction in its distinctive consumption activities. Here, conservative ideology has been institutionalised through the proliferation of conservation and preservation bodies such as the National Trust, and more recently English Heritage. Membership of such groups is regarded as appropriating cultural capital to signify allegiance to a particular sector of society. Subscription to magazines that focus on 'country-living', heritage and tradition, along with participation in other cultural practices such as museum-visiting constitute the key cultural capital that is aligned to this 'new' service class. Similarly, Jager and Mills have demonstrated how 'heritage' is incorporated within the complex strategies of new class distinction associated with urban gentrification.

The economic possibilities of the 'heritage industry' have continued to be rehearsed in scholarly debate. Unfortunately, while there is a plethora of case studies of various places' attempts at economic regeneration through the 'heritage

tourism' route and the implementation of 'cultural policies' (cf. Bianchini and Parkinson, 1993; Kearns and Philo, 1993), what has remained absent from such discussions has been the voices of those who work within or are drawn to experience these cultural 'industries'. My research addresses this omission.

I have illustrated how heritage has been appropriated on two quite distinct levels. First, it has been used as a 'rallying cry' (Samuel, 1992) by Conservative politicians, to signify the need to look back and remember the virtues and values that made Britain/England a 'great' nation. This is exemplified by Margaret Thatcher: following 'her' victory in the Falklands, Thatcher claimed 'We have put the Great back into Great Britain' (Greengrass, 1992: ix). Second, heritage has been appropriated for money-spinning activities geared to the attainment of an 'enterprise culture'. In this economic role, heritage has been used to sell places to attract inward investment, to provide images through which people can find a sense of belonging, to provide the means by which class affiliation (namely the service class) can be appropriated through the purchase of cultural capital. In these respects, heritage has been used as a cultural remedy for contemporary ills: a rallying cry and economic panacea. In addition, three competing approaches to consumption have been identified: mass culture critique, pleasures of consumption and social distinction (Mackay, 1997).

ii. Heritage as the cause: the radical interpretation

In conjunction with the conservative ideology there exists a second, more 'radical' interpretation of heritage. Far from the medicine for society's ills, heritage is seen

as the cause of its sickness. Rather than the tonic for society's ailing health, 'heritage' is depicted by critics as the fly in the ointment.

It has been argued that contemporary society's current fad with heritage suggests a lack of confidence in today's achievements: 'the [tourist] brochures carry no pictures of the Lloyds building, no Paul Smith suits, no Hockney paintings: you would be forgiven for thinking that all intellectual life in Britain ceased in about 1890' (Barrett, 1993). There is disquiet amongst commentators, the 'heritage industry' indicating contemporary society as more eager to look back, rather than to the present or future. To Samuel, 'heritage, according to the critics, is the mark of a sick society, one which, despairing of the future, had become 'besotted' or 'obsessed' with an *idealised version of the past*' (1994:260, my emphasis). The present has been overshadowed by mythical constructions of bygone times. As McRobbie (1994: 147) notes, following Jameson (1985) and Savage (1983):

> '[loss] of faith in the future has produced a culture which can only look backwards and re-examine key moments of its own recent history with a sentimental gloss and a soft focus lens. Society is now incapable of producing serious images, or texts which give people meaning and direction. The gap opened up by this absence is filled instead with cultural bric-a-brac and with old images recycled and reintroduced into circulation as pastiche'.

Critics maintain that it is the ways in which the past is offered for consumption that are responsible for diverting society's attention away from contemporary realities (Fowler, 1992). For Robert Hewison (1987), the past consumed at heritage themed sites is contrived, selective and inauthentic. In a similar vein Urry, taking note of Jordonova (1989), argues that heritage presentations suffer from distortion because of the 'emphasis on visualisation' (1990:112) which occurs when patterns of life are constructed (or visualised) around artefacts displayed in

museums. This process by necessity it is argued, *has* to 'ignore' or 'trivialise' certain social (sensory) experiences (Urry, 1990). As Jordonova concedes, claiming exactitude 'is an open lie, because an exact facsimile is technically impossible, and many aspects of life cannot be conveyed through looking, smelling and listening ...' (1989:25). The result is a past offered for consumption which has had all the death, disease, squalor and sadness erased to produce 'artefactual' history (Hewison, 1987; Urry, 1990).

The perils of the nostalgic impulse are a key element in this critique of the attention to bygone times. Once considered a medical condition associated with homesickness (Lowenthal, 1985; 1989) nostalgia now provokes ire in academic debate. It has been argued that this desire to look back is an avoidance strategy, the result of a profound disillusionment and despair with the present state of society (Hewison, 1987). For Christopher Lasch, 'the victim of nostalgia ... is an incurable sentimentalist ... Afraid of the future he [sic] is also afraid to face the truth about the past' (1984, cited in Lowenthal, 1989:20). To this end, whilst society may be disillusioned with present day problems, representations of the past offered for 'remedial' consumption are distorted and fraudulent and do not help to alleviate contemporary worries, merely temporarily suspending or displacing them: '... nostalgia filters out unpleasant aspects of the past...creating a self-esteem that helps us rise above the anxieties of the present ...' (Hewison, 1987:46).

If the conservative ideology favours cultural policies and the heritage industry as solutions for contemporary economic ills, then the radical interpretation is more sceptical. The job-creating capabilities of heritage tourism deflect attention away from the fundamental loss of 'real jobs' in a post-industrial economy. The rise of the service sector has seen an increase in demand for (often seasonal or temporary) part-time, female labour. In contrast, the jobs lost as a result of economic restructuring were predominantly manufacturing, male and full-time (Allen, 1989). Clearly, there is a mismatch in terms of the nature of jobs lost and jobs created. Clearly, also, the notion of the 'real job' reveals an inherent conservatism within this radical critique. Nevertheless, as the costs of creating jobs in tourism are significantly less than in sectors such as manufacturing or engineering, tourism strategies are likely to remain a priority with local authorities and government policies intent on the economic revitalisation of their locality (cf. Lumley, 1988).

The results of these changing economic relations are evident when ex-miners are subsequently employed as guides to show visitors around their former coal mine which has now become an industrial heritage attraction (Prentice et al, 1993). For example, Bennett (1988) contrasts the industrial decay inherent in the town of Consett with the nearby 'prosperity' evident at Beamish industrial museum. Hewison (1987) comments on the irony that we are now manufacturing heritage rather than other economic goods: we now have a heritage industry, as opposed to a manufacturing industry. To Harvey (1989) this creation of 'images without substance' makes little attempt to solve the root problem. Moreover, the strategy

of urban regeneration through heritage tourism is inherently ephemeral: through easily replicated cultural-economic policies, virtually any place is able to capitalise on its past; any competitive advantage is soon lost, the strategy becoming self-defeating.

I have shown how the radical interpretation has argued that heritage perpetuated this sickness in society through presenting a mythical version of 'the past', a golden age which contrasts with today's social problems (McRobbie, 1994). In terms of curing economic ills, the 'heritage strategy' is not sustainable.

Two distinct views on 'heritage' have been traced (the conservative and radical positions), both views share a common authoritarian stance. Here, I argue that contributors to the heritage debate cast their opinions in a rather broad-brushed and top-down manner. To this end, these accounts have a predominantly critical and exclusionary flavour. For instance, I have shown how Reas and Cosgrove's (1993) pictorial documentation of visitors to heritage sites exemplifies the 'sneering' (Wright, 1989) inherent in heritage discourse. Moreover, some critics within the debate suggest that those consuming these representations of the past are 'cultural dupes': they are deluded by and passively accept the 'fantasy' that one can know what it is like to live in times past; or that they are taken in by the 'spectacle'. At this point, I am mindful of Peter Jackson's (1995) recent comment concerning (in retailing studies) the perpetual postponement of the ethnographic moment, in terms of talking to actual consumers (on-the-ground). I suggest this also applies to heritage discourse. It seems easier to sneer and critique than to try

and access the crucial, missing voices. The heritage debate lacks utterances from those who have been receptive to such representations of other times and places. Ley and Olds (1988) is one of the few studies to access visitors' voices and challenge the 'cultural dupe' thesis.

The changing nature of employment opportunities following deindustrialisation and the rise of the service sector are widely documented in academic discourse. Attention has been paid to the perceived job creating capabilities of the heritage industry, and yet, despite this attention, there has been little interest in finding out what has it been like to have experienced such changes, first-hand. The research moves away from simply ruminating the nature of jobs lost and gained in these turbulent times and moves towards accessing the voices of those who now work in such cultural industries. This current study also explores the experiences of those who having worked in manufacturing or heavy industry, now find themselves in the service sector.

2.4 Conceptualising the production and consumption of heritage

The chapter now presents the conceptual framework in which the thesis has been grounded. First, I problematise 'heritage' by demonstrating how, like 'culture' it is a *contested* concept. Next, I consider the 'crisis of representation' (Marcus and Fischer, 1986) and examine the key approaches to the theorisation of representation.

i. Culture and heritage: problematic and contested concepts

For Hebdige culture is a 'notoriously ambiguous concept' (1979:5), a result of the diverse and sometimes contradictory meanings ascribed to it over the years. More recently, the same conclusions have been drawn about heritage (cf. Tunbridge and Ashworth, 1996). Hall (1997) offers two meanings which have been assigned to culture. First, Hall argues that the classic definition of culture has been sealed within a simple binary opposition between high and popular/mass culture. 'High' culture signified 'the best that has been thought and said in the world' (Arnold, 1868 in Hebdige, 1979:6) particularly in reference to the arts, opera and literature. In contrast, popular/mass culture represented the 'dreadful lack of taste of popular cultural forms like the music-hall, cartoons or rock music' (Thrift, 1989:14). The second definition of culture refers to the distinct way of life of a social group, community or people. This is the ground of anthropological research and certain strands of cultural geography.

In order to be thought of as 'belonging' to a culture, it is deemed necessary to share meanings, values and behavioural traits. For example, such a sense of 'belonging' has been documented in recent years through the notion of cultural capital and the concept of (cultural) 'distinction' (Bourdieu, 1984) as being implicit to the identification or construction of the service class (Thrift, 1989). Thrift (1989) notes that the appropriation of particular goods, beliefs, occupations and behavioural practices (lifestyles) has resulted in the formation of a distinct sense of cultural 'identity' and grouping among the middle classes, forged out of

the ethos of heritage, tradition and appeal of 'country-style' living. Moreover, this construction of a 'new' service class illustrates the constitutive role of culture as a process shaping social subjects (Hall, 1997).

In their attempts at writing the past, heritage centres and museums can be seen as cultivating a sense of unity and belonging. For example, 'The Way We Were' Heritage Centre at Wigan Pier represents Wigan life in the year 1900; a series of cameo displays, such as 'Wakes' week, coal mining and walking day construct a sense of local identity and cohesion. Similarly, the aim of the Museum of Liverpool Life is as follows:

> 'Through lively and imaginative displays, the museum will tell the story of Liverpool and its people and their contribution to national life' (Museum of Liverpool Life, promotional material, c.1994).

The museum focuses attention on Liverpool's role in 'national' life but also conveys a *local* identity through the inclusion of a series of shared meanings and values which 'belong' to Liverpool, such as the theme 'Mersey Culture' which portrays, for example, the Grand National, football and the Beatles.

As well as focusing on the cultivation of 'insider' status, boundaries of exclusion can also be in operation, as exemplified in Hebdige's (1979) work on youth 'subcultures'. In Section 2.3i I referred to Stanley Baldwin's political ideology as being one which used heritage in an exclusionary capacity. Baldwin's ideology failed to include those who were *foreign* born. Moreover, actual representations of the past in heritage centres and museums have been viewed as exclusionary. For example, representations of women in museums have been considered as

exclusionary through largely portraying women in the domestic sphere of the home, ignoring their presence and participation in other areas of society (cf. Porter, 1988). In their study of Stirling's heritage, Edensor and Kothari (1994) suggest that the Scottish city offers a masculinist portrayal of the past. Once a battle site where 'famous' Scottish victories over the English took place, Stirling's history is 'military-inscribed', exemplified by the Bannockburn Heritage Centre. Edensor and Kothari conclude that when women are (rarely) acknowledged it is in relation to 'heroic' male endeavours. Similarly, Belgrave (1990) argues that representations of black history are mainly absent from British museums, and when they are present it is usually in some 'victim-oriented' role such as servants or slaves. Maintaining that it is predominantly *white* history which is displayed in museums, Stephenson's (1994) study of Manchester's heritage suggests that the multiculturalism of the city's population has been largely ignored in museum representations and, moreover, on the few occasions that it has been recognised, the displays are 'tokenistic' gestures. Jackson (1991) highlights the controversy surrounding an exhibition on African history (entitled, *Into the Heart of Africa*) held at the Royal Ontario Museum. The exhibition sparked public protest because it was a white (Canadian) interpretation of black (African) history; as Jackson notes 'the museum failed to consult adequately with its potential audience before the show opened, underestimating the significance of Africa within the contemporary black community's 'geographical imagination'' (1991:132).

Clearly, the notion of heritage as exclusionary has several implications for the research on the production and consumption of representations of the past. In

particular, the suggestion that heritage operates boundaries of exclusion raises questions about the truth, value and legitimacy of such representations: *who* is involved in the production of such exhibitions and *how* have such displays been received by visitors? These boundaries of exclusion become more acute in museums where *place* as well as history are represented: the insider/outsider status influencing the experiencing of such representations.

The problem of culture's 'high/low' divide is also replicated in 'heritage'. Museums and cultural institutions are conventionally perceived as housing the 'best' examples of society's creations and are therefore deemed representative of 'high' culture (Bennett, 1995). At the same time however, heritage has been criticised for pandering to popular or mass entertainment tastes in the form of the 'heritage industry' (Hewison, 1987) and its commercialised kitsch. To this end, heritage's 'siting' in both camps clearly illustrates how heritage is problematic and therefore contested. Moreover, heritage can also be linked to the anthropological definition of culture through the attempts of ethnology and social history museums to exhibit or portray the 'ways of life' of peoples and communities (cf. Lidchi, 1997). In effect, heritage *as* ethnography, sees museums attempting to make sense and offer representations of people's ways of life (signalled in Chapter 4). But, as I have also shown above, as well as portraying inclusive, 'shared meanings', heritage can operate 'boundaries of exclusion', hence, clearly, like culture, heritage too is a contested and therefore political concept (cf. Lavine and Karp, 1991).

2.5 Deconstructing representation

It has been established that heritage, like the broader concept of culture is concerned with shared meanings and boundaries of exclusion. To this end, the notion of heritage relies on access to and communication of meanings through representation, in order to consolidate both inclusive or exclusionary practices. Three key theories have been put forward to explain the concept and practice of representation. According to the reflective or 'mimetic' (Duncan and Ley, 1993) school of thought, meaning is considered be written in the object, and language '*reflect*[s] the true meaning as it already exists in the world' (Hall, 1997:24). The 'intentional' approach in contrast, has meaning imposed on the 'object' by the author. Finally, the third theory of representation challenges both the reflective and intentional theories, because it argues that neither the object itself, nor the user of language can *fix* meaning (Hall, 1997). Moreover, for Hall, 'meaning is thought to be produced - constructed - rather than simply 'found'' (1997:5). There are two key strands inherent in the constructionist approach: the 'poetics' of representation which considers how language produces meaning and the 'politics' of representation where the effects and consequences of representation and the knowledge produced are examined (Hall, 1997). Here, the *reception* of representations is considered: the constructionist approach does not privilege the author or 'object' in the practice of representation, the audience (reader) is also included. Moreover, it is in the reception of representations that meaning is deemed to be produced (representations as 'texts' to be read), leading to debates surrounding the metaphorical 'death' of the author (cf. Barnes and Duncan, 1992).

The 'constructionist' theory of representation has significant implications for examining the production and consumption of representations of the past. Lidchi (1997) considers the 'poetics' and 'politics' of museum collecting and exhibiting. Lidchi (1997) maintains that museum exhibiting 'works' like a language through choices made over what is shown or said. The politics of museum exhibiting are revealed through the power relations which exist between exhibit, exhibitor and exhibited. Primarily, the heritage debate has centred on what has been produced for public understanding as the past. However, little attention has been paid to public *response* to such representations (cf. Urry, 1996). This is one taking-off point for this thesis, which looks closely at this practice of representing the past. Examining the reception of representations of the past adheres to this constructionist view of representation. The metaphorical 'death' of the curator (as author) returns us to the significance of meaning produced by those drawn to 'read' such 'texts' (representations) i.e. the visitors.

As a final twist, language used in representation is problematic because historical meanings attached and ingrained in words can influence the 'writing' and reception of representations. So, in any attempt at 'writing' the past, producers must acknowledge earlier and competing associations that visitors might draw from the language used in any representation.

2.6 The 'crisis' of representation

The fundamental 'problem' of representation, outlined in the previous section, has received considerable attention within the humanities in recent years (Marcus and

Fischer, 1986; Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Barnes and Duncan, 1992; Duncan and Ley, 1993; Hall, 1997). Recognition that representation involves a plurality of interpretations (on the part of both representer and audience) led to anxiety about the actual practice of representation (Marcus and Fischer, 1986). This crisis has been most keenly felt in anthropology.

Once, according to Clifford, all that was required of the ethnographer (as representer) was the ability to '[keep] good field notes, [make] accurate maps and '[write] up' results' (1986:2). As Gregory noted (from Foucault, 1970), the researcher's role was 'to bring language as close as possible to the observing gaze, and the things observed as close as possible to words' (1994: 21).

The problems of representation have been illustrated and examined most clearly in the ethnographic interpretations produced in anthropological research. To this end, there has been a questioning of the authority of academics to represent or portray other peoples and other cultures, in terms of *who* does the representing, *who* is represented, *how* they are represented and *why* they are represented. For Said, 'the real issue is whether indeed there can be a true representation of anything, or whether any and all representations, because they are representations, are embedded first in the language and then in the culture, institutions, and political ambience of the representer' (1978:272). Museums, too, are ethnographies: their representations shaping public understanding of the past (Lidchi, 1997). What does this 'crisis' imply for the curator, as keeper, writer and representer of the past? Cloke (1994) cites the work of Elspeth Probyn (1993)

who 'summarises previous suggestions that the ethnographic project is about a *production* of the real rather than about how to discover it, and that ethnography thereby concerns the practice of *writing* culture rather than revealing it' (1994:150). As such, it can be argued that museum representations write the past (construct the past) rather than reveal it, as it 'truly' was. Similarly, as Clifford has remarked, 'the historical predicament of ethnography ... is always caught up in the invention, not the representation of cultures' (1986:2); as such, it follows that museums as ethnographies 'invent', rather than represent other times or places. As already suggested, museums as 'texts' in the constructionist view, see meaning produced in the reception of displays: hence, witnessing the 'death' of the curator (cf. Barnes and Duncan, 1992).

As a research method and writing strategy, ethnography results in tension between researchers and those 'studied'. Museum professionals are faced with these difficulties; tensions clearly existing between museums and the 'others' they portray, as noted earlier by Jackson (1991) in terms of the representation of black history.

A questioning of the validity of the written account produced by ethnographers added fuel to the crisis of representation. Clifford argued that the writing process involved the use of 'expressive tropes, figures and allegories that select and impose meaning as they translate it' (1986:7). In response to the crisis the 'experimental moment' has produced both an era of self-reflexivity among academics and also a focus on the textual strategies used in the representation of

'others'. Academics have been asking questions about who they are and how their values, biases and moralities, in turn have coloured, prejudiced and informed their research. Jackson (1993) illustrates the problems inherent in trying to give voice or speak for others. The notion of finding a position from which to speak for marginalised groups, according to Jackson (1993) can be portrayed positively because the margin 'offers a strong position from which to speak [which is] validated by the authority of experience' (1993:123). This argument finds resonance with curators who use oral history in museum representations as 'authentic' evidence from lived experience. Yet, Jackson maintains that there is a fear of what Spivak (1988) calls the 'subaltern's voice' being appropriated and represented 'unproblematically as the 'authentic' voice of the [for example] colonial Other' (Jackson, 1993:123). Oral history as an unproblematic source of the 'truth' can be challenged because when the marginalised eventually find 'a position from which to speak' their voice must be considered along with other voices that have already spoken too loudly and for too long: oral history becomes just another representation of the past (cf. Perks and Thomson, 1998).

Moreover, there is a heightened awareness that when the marginalised do speak, their voices are often interpreted or translated into a form suitable for a particular audience. For example, Linda McDowell (1994) cites bell hooks (1991) who argues that 'the textual strategies preferred by some black scholars too often are rearranged to suit the ear of the mainly white audience...' (1994:243). The mediating and conditioning of representations of the past is considered in

Chapters 4 and 5, where empirical research has found evidence of modifications being made by museum professionals to 'suit' the audience.

Is it not possible to step outside the problems of representation through ethnography? Of course, scholars can strive to make their research much more informed (both for the audience and represented) in terms of acknowledging or showing an awareness of the politics and power relations inherent in the practice of representation. Lidchi (1997) has examined curatorial attempts to reveal to visitors the reasoning behind and the processes involved in the production of museum representations for public consumption. By adopting a self-reflective attitude (a 'politics of position') attempts can be made to delve into the researcher's own 'cultural baggage' for clues, evidence or justification for producing 'tainted' accounts of 'others'. However, positionality too has limitations and problems, in terms of being influenced by people, or events that you are not aware of (Jackson, 1991a).

2.7 Summary

In this chapter I have presented my interpretation of the contemporary heritage debate. I have suggested that it is a debate seemingly fraught with polarities, in particular, as to whether current interest in bygone times is addressed in a positive or negative manner. Those who are drawn as 'consumers' to museums and heritage attractions are given very critical, if cursory treatment in heritage discourse. Visitors are cast as passive 'victims' of the heritage industry and yet, it remains that very limited studies have been conducted which have sought to

explore the nature of visitor encounters with these heritage representations. My research aims to address this empirical weakness. Furthermore, I have argued that in attempting to make sense of the consumption of museums and heritage attractions it is necessary to understand the broader components of the heritage debate such as the contested nature of culture and heritage and the competing theories surrounding representation. Positioning museums as 'texts' to be read (where meaning is produced) privileges reading (i.e. reception) *over* representation, signalling the importance placed in this study to discovering visitor readings of museum exhibits and displays. Outlining the fundamental processes at work in the production and consumption of representations of the past has therefore laid down the foundations from which this qualitative study has been undertaken.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter it was argued that the heritage debate was in need of new ideas and research strategies. This chapter documents the methods used to carry out the empirical research on the production and consumption of representations of the past. An overview of the field research is given which outlines both the methods employed to generate the data and the rationale behind their selection. The adoption of qualitative research methods in recent studies of heritage attractions and museums is also noted. This chapter provides background contextualisation of each of the case study sites used in the research. Finally, the practicalities of the research are outlined, indicating how the research was conducted, analysed and structured, and also highlighting modifications made during the course of the field work.

The aim of the study has been to produce, using qualitative research methods, an evaluation of the experience of representations of place and history from the perspectives of producer and consumer. The aim was achieved through identifying types of heritage tourism activity in northern industrial localities in order to select suitable case study sites. Next, production and consumption profiles of three case studies were established. Then, the assumptions of the social and cultural commentators on heritage, such as Robert Hewison and Peter Fowler (whose work was summarised in Chapter 2) were submitted to empirical investigation, via

a qualitative study, which finally led to the production of an evaluation of the *experience* of representations of other times in themed places.

3.2 Research in heritage sites

Hooper-Greenhill has argued that museum studies have been focused on visitor numbers rather than any in-depth evaluations of museum experiences, or the 'needs, wishes or feelings of the audience' (1988:215). Whilst many museums do carry out their own visitor surveys, they are often conducted with tight budgets and little staff training (Hooper-Greenhill, 1988). More recently, Bicknell and Farmelo (1993) brought together a collection of essays by museum professionals which review the achievements and limitations of museum visitor studies to date, and consider the key issues facing such studies in the coming years. Following Miles (1993), Bicknell and Farmelo (1993:8) note that for visitor studies, the greatest change to occur over the past 15 years has been a shift from trying to find out the effects exhibits have on visitors, to instead trying to 'gain some understanding of the visitors' perception of an exhibition'. The difficulties of achieving such an understanding are also recognised. This change in attitudes by museum professionals mirrors and strengthens the approach of the thesis, in that it is an attempt to gain an understanding of the consumption of representations of the past.

Hudson (1993) criticises museum visitor surveys for being too simplistic and focusing on 'the easily measurable parameters rather than on the more important,

yet elusive, effects that may transcend analysis' (Bicknell and Farmelo, 1993:8). Hudson believes that 'specialists in consumer attitudes and in market research are expert at eliciting and studying half-truths. Museum directors would learn a great deal more about the opinions of visitors from long exploratory conversations with half-a-dozen people than from expensive commissioned reports' (1993:35). To this end, Hudson seems to reject the 'traditional' quantitative research methods (such as large-scale visitors surveys) in favour of digging deeper through more qualitative approaches to museum studies, as he continues: 'I have often felt that it is more valuable to explore the reactions of one museum visitor in depth and detail than to scratch around on the surface of a thousand' (1993:38).

Light and Prentice have also argued that little attention has been paid to the consumers of the 'heritage industry'; they claim that 'relatively little is known of their characteristics, motives and expectations' (1994: 90). But despite calls for more qualitative approaches to museum studies (cf. Hooper-Greenhill, 1988; Hudson, 1993), Light and Prentice's study of visitors to heritage sites in Wales illustrates the continued existence and persistence of more quantitative efforts to research the consumption of representations of the past. Such quantitative approaches to studying museums reinforce the static and jaded nature of the heritage debate. The continued rehearsal of the same quantitative methods of enquiry can do no more than scratch at the surface of gaining an understanding of visitor experiences of museums and heritage themed attractions. It is necessary to move away from the 'thinly' descriptive accounts offered by quantitative

approaches to considering the merits of the 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) and 'deeper' interpretations gained from qualitative studies.

In their investigation of the existence of a 'museum gaze' amongst visitors to museums, Fyfe and Ross (1996:131) interviewed 'subjects ... together as households by means of open-ended discussions'. This use of a focus group research strategy is evidence of an emerging qualitative approach to museum studies. Moreover, Bagnall's (1996) study of the consumption of heritage also moves away from the quantitative bias towards a more flexible qualitative approach which involved interviewing visitors as they moved around heritage sites.

Whilst the work of Bagnall (1996) and Fyfe and Ross (1996) as well as the study offered here, are indicative of a shift from quantitative to qualitative approaches in academic studies of museums, it was discovered during the course of the fieldwork that such qualitative research practices had been operational 'on-the-ground' at one of the case study sites. A series of focus groups had been conducted at the Museum of Liverpool Life as part of the initial planning stages of one of the museum's new exhibitions. Focus groups were used to find out people's reactions to the curator's plans for a new military display.

3.3 Choice of case study sites: sensitivity to the 'heritage spectrum'

'Heritage themed site' (or 'attraction') is a collective term used in the research to refer to any place or venue geared towards offering representations of the 'past' for public consumption. As such both museums and heritage centres are included in this definition.

Choosing suitable sites at which an empirical investigation could take place required an examination of the scope of the perceived 'heritage industry' in England: what exactly was being offered for consumption as heritage tourist experiences? To this end, it was necessary to build up a picture of what types of heritage themed sites were available as tourist products. Tourist Information Centres and Regional Tourist Boards throughout England were contacted in March, 1994 asking for information on any museums or heritage centres in the area. The brochures and promotional leaflets received were examined and potential case studies were narrowed down through selecting those sites which met most of the following criteria: having an industrial heritage theme(s), using demonstrators or role players, and located in the north west of England.

A postal questionnaire was designed to obtain more information on the potential case study sites. The postal questionnaire was initially piloted to twelve heritage sites in the Midlands/Gloucestershire area. The questionnaire was designed to find out details concerning, for example, themes presented, age of site, ownership, methods of presentation. Eleven prompt replies were received which seemed a

strong indicator of the 'respondent friendly' nature of the survey, and no amendments were made. The questionnaire was sent in July 1994 to 34 heritage themed sites in the north of England; from these, 27 replied (79% response rate). Out of these 5 sites thought to be possible case studies were visited (August 1994): Bradford Industrial Museum, Helmshore Textile Museum, Albert Dock, Quarry Bank Mill and the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester. Despite not being included in the questionnaire sample, Wigan Pier was also visited because of the researcher's prior knowledge about the site. Appendix I summarises the details of each of the sites visited, and includes information obtained from the survey.

After visiting these sites it was decided that the Museum of Liverpool Life at the Albert Dock, Wigan Pier and Quarry Bank Mill, Styal would be the most suitable sites for the research. The Museum of Liverpool Life (MLL) offered potential as a case study for several reasons. The museum was relatively new (it had opened May 1993) and therefore I thought that it would be a fresh testing ground for the empirical investigation. The Museum of Liverpool Life also had plans for expansion and it was thought that it might be interesting to observe the development of the next phases (although, in the end, the expansion programme was delayed and did not feature in the research). The MLL offers representations of both contemporary and more distant aspects of Liverpool's history, portrayed through interactive and audio-visual displays as well as the incorporation of demonstrations. Clearly, there are a plurality of experiences available for the

visitors to consume. Wigan Pier and Quarry Bank Mill were chosen because they were well established heritage attractions (opened during the 1980s) and met all the criteria. Quarry Bank Mill (QBM) is a working textile museum which traces the journey of cotton from fibre to fabric, as well as providing a social history of mill life (from the early 1800s to the late 1950s). Wigan Pier (WP) offers representations of life in Wigan in the year 1900. A variety of presentation styles are offered for consumption, including 'hands on' and audio-visual displays, and period dramas performed by Wigan Pier Theatre Company.

These three sites can be placed under the banner of recent history/within living memory, at one end of the heritage 'spectrum', given the relatively recent historical scope portrayed within these sites. In Chapter 2 I mentioned how this 'spectrum' (from recent history, to Viking times and beyond) allows for a more sensitive appreciation of the complex and different relationships between producers and consumers at these sites. At Jorvik, for instance, whilst many of the methods of display can characterise 'new' museological (Vergo, 1988) approaches (smells, demonstrations, hands-on etc.), replicating many of the practices of recent history museums, the actual knowledge possessed by visitors to Jorvik about the Viking era (unless, they have a particular interest in this subject) will rely on curatorial endeavours to make sense of these times. In contrast, the museums and heritage attractions chosen for this current study are focused on the not-so-distant past: within one or two generations. Here, relations between producers and consumers are different as visitors to these sites may not

necessarily need or want curators 'storying' these times for them: the storying here coming from visitors' own memories. As such, given the these types of heritage attraction, I anticipated evidence emerging from the qualitative field research, which indicated that visitors were using their own memories to experience and engage with the representations offered for consumption at these sites.

Having decided that the Museum of Liverpool Life, Quarry Bank Mill and Wigan Pier would be suitable case study sites, each site was contacted requesting permission to use the site for the research. Written consent was obtained from the curator at QBM (Adam Daber), the Head of Regional History at MLL (Loraine Knowles) and the Customer Services Manager at WP (Carole Tyldesley). Meetings were arranged during October and November 1994 with each of these 'gatekeepers' in order to explain in more detail the nature and purpose of the study to be undertaken at the site and also to discuss the possible methods of enquiry that it was hoped to conduct there.

Initially, the qualitative study was going to consist of detailed empirical work at three sites. However, preliminary research indicated that three detailed case studies was too ambitious and, given the fact that Quarry Bank Mill and Wigan Pier were well-documented in the heritage literature (see for example, Hewison, 1987; Urry, 1990), the Museum of Liverpool Life became the main case study

site. At Wigan Pier and Quarry Bank Mill more limited qualitative research was to be conducted.

Whilst I had intended the MLL to be the main case study as the field work progressed some significant difficulties arose, namely the inability to recruit school parties visiting MLL into the study -- only schools visiting Quarry Bank Mill and Wigan Pier were willing to participate. An interpretation of children's experiences was therefore undertaken based on the QBM and WP cases.

3.4 Production and consumption profiles of each site

This section provides production and consumption profiles for each of the sites, including an indication of the themes portrayed and experiences offered for public consumption and understanding.

The Museum of Liverpool Life (MLL) opened Phase 1 in May 1993, at the Albert Dock site, Liverpool (see Photograph 3.1 below). The site is owned and run by National Museums and Galleries on Museum (NMGM). Phase 1 consists of three themes: Making a Living, Demanding a Voice and Mersey Culture, which are reworkings of many of the themes and galleries from the Merseyside Museum of Labour History which closed in November 1991. The next phases of the MLL's expansion programme are: Homes and Communities (Phase 2) and the King's Regiment (Phase 3). More recently, the museum opened a Public Health exhibition (July 1997). There is a plurality of visitor experiences on offer for

Photograph 3.1: The Museum of Liverpool Life, Albert Dock, Liverpool

Photograph 3.2: Wigan Pier Heritage Centre, Wigan

consumption, including an interactive encounter in the TV programme 'Brookside' display, the opportunity to participate in a printing demonstration with a resident craft demonstrator in the reconstructed printer's workshop and visitor operated audio-visual presentations. 'Recent' aspects of Liverpool's history are represented, for example, the Beatles, the Grand National horse race, football, as well as more 'distant' history, such as the printing trade, trade unions, the cotton trade and dock life.

Wigan Pier is located on the banks of the Leeds-Liverpool Canal at Wigan (see Photograph 3.2 above). 'The Way We Were' heritage centre is owned and managed by Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council and aims to portray life in Wigan in the year 1900. There are various displays and exhibitions which seek to represent aspects of Wiganers' lives during the Victorian era, including a reconstruction of a coal miner's cottage, the market square and a school room. Wigan Pier Theatre Company perform plays daily in various parts of the heritage centre.

Quarry Bank Mill is situated in the Bollin Valley, at Styal Country Park, Cheshire. The country park estate (which includes the Mill buildings) is owned by the National Trust. Quarry Bank Mill Trust leases the Mill (and museum) buildings from the National Trust. The Quarry Bank Mill Trust is run by paid officials but relies on the help and goodwill of hundreds of volunteers (the Friends of Quarry Bank Mill). Quarry Bank Mill is a 'working' mill, the cloth produced is made into

clothes which are sold in the Mill Shop under the 'Calico' brand. Quarry Bank Mill represents the development of the 'factory colony' system in the textile industry, and the paternalism of Samuel Greg and the Greg family. The Mill presents aspects of social history (what it was like to live and work at Styal) as well as the technological changes which have evolved in the production of cotton thread and material. Costumed workers and demonstrators allow visitors to participate in a variety of hands-on activities.

3.5 Overview of the field research conducted

In this section I provide a detailed account of the strategies and methods employed to gather the data, namely the 'voices' of those involved in producing and experiencing representations of times past.

i. Visitor survey: design and implementation

One of the first methods used in this study was a short visitor survey. This was deemed a practical way of obtaining the opinions of visitors to the sites. The intention was not to conduct a large-scale (market research) visitor survey as statistics were available from a recent NMGM (1994) commissioned visitor survey, which documented visitor characteristics and general impressions of visitors to all NMGM museums. The report has statistics for each NMGM museum, including MLL. A similar visitor survey had been conducted at Quarry Bank Mill (1994). With the availability of this secondary data, a short questionnaire was designed to include questions allowing respondents' answers

and opinions to be recorded 'verbatim'. The questionnaire sought to obtain the following information:

- how visitors had heard about the attraction;
- visitor expectations - whether they had been met;
- whether their visit had achieved the aim in the site's promotional literature;
- visitor's perception of the role of museums/heritage sites in contemporary society;
- children's perceptions of heritage.

The pilot questionnaire (Appendix II) needed reworking in terms of rephrasing and reordering some questions, and it benefited from suggestions made by the gatekeepers. The pilot survey was conducted on the 29 and 30 August 1995. The survey took 15 minutes to administer. Fifteen questionnaires were completed over the two days. The pilot survey was conducted to test and improve the questionnaire. At the same time, however, I found that it raised several issues. The initial difficulty was in getting visitors to agree to take part in the survey. This was a significant stumbling block, compounded further by both the low numbers of visitors to the site and the fact that many visitors were part of 'family groups' who were unwilling to break off from their group for a few minutes to participate in the survey. Moreover, another problem to arise with those who did agree to answer my questions was getting people to actually think about the questions being asked ("Oh! I'd have to think about that one...", "Oh - I'd have to go around it again"). I found this quite frustrating but then on reflection, it is quite

significant in terms of what these responses suggest for some visitors to museums: are they engaging critically with what they see? Understandably, visitors' attention wavered with those accompanying children, and also with those people who were in a large group. When approaching couples, it was difficult to just talk to one of them; on occasion this led to both people answering some or all of the questions.

Another problem that arose administering the questionnaire was that I had too many 'prompt' cards. To remedy this, 'personal information' prompts were put on one card. Finally, the introduction to the survey was altered to mention that the survey had been authorised by the museum's curatorial staff and that they would eventually have access to this information. The pilot study enabled the identification of questions which 'worked' well and the ones which worked not so well and needed either re-wording or deleting. After the pilot had been conducted, the following questions were omitted from the questionnaire:

Question 18 on the pilot was directed to people who had visited the Museum of Liverpool Life with children under 16. This question proved unsuccessful, with few visitors with children being prepared to participate in the survey. To this end, I reasoned that it would be more beneficial to concentrate on accessing children's voices through the school visit interviews.

Question 15 on the pilot survey, 'What does 'the past' mean to you?' was a very open and general question, aimed at getting the respondent to articulate what they understood by the term 'the past'. I was quite surprised by the reaction this

question had from the respondents. Some visitors were very hesitant, as though the question pricked very personal thoughts that they did not want to share. I stuck with the question throughout the pilot survey but felt significantly embarrassed asking it and deleted it from the final survey. In contrast question 13 on the pilot survey, 'Please define the term 'heritage', provoked no such hesitancy, avoidance or embarrassment from the visitors. It suggested that perhaps 'heritage' is viewed as a collective term or suggestive of 'shared meanings' rather than the private thoughts that the 'past' evoked in visitors. The question was rephrased, for stylistic reasons, following the pilot survey: 'What do you understand by the term 'heritage'?

Questions 4, 11 and 12 on the pilot (see Appendix II for exact details) concerned how visitors first found out about MLL, features which could be improved, and whether it was 'worth a visit'. All of these questions were eliminated merely as a pruning exercise, to find both space and time for new (more relevant and important) questions. The following 'new' questions were included in the amended questionnaire (see Appendix III):

Replying to question 14 on the visitor survey 'What do you understand by the term 'authenticity'?' several visitors suggested that its meaning is 'self evident': it does not need defining or explaining. Maybe the question could have been rephrased but it was decided to drop the question given the hostile response from some visitors (I felt like I was offending people or being patronising).

The thoughts of visitors on the presence and use of role players and demonstrators in the museum and whether they had participated in this experience had been absent in the pilot study. The new question 11 (see Appendix III) was included to remedy this omission.

A final inclusion was question 15 (see Appendix III) regarding the role of curators. As the pilot survey did not have a question regarding the role of museum curators (professionals) there was no evidence to suggest that visitors were aware of who is responsible for exhibits or how they perceive museum displays being put together. The inclusion of this question rectified this major absence. Question 15 b., was used as a 'sounding board' or, an 'imaginary' opportunity for visitors to direct their views about their visit to the curators.

Regarding 'personal information' at the end of the questionnaire, an omission from both the pilot and the amended questionnaire was the 'ethnic origin' of respondents. Given this important oversight I was surprised that it was also overlooked by others who commented on the drafts of the questionnaire. Its absence is entirely my own fault, but what does this suggest or imply (about me?) about the questionnaire results?

Following the pilot, the questionnaire was changed so that it could be used at both Wigan Pier and Quarry Bank Mill. However, the survey was not conducted at

QBM as I decided to use that site as a focus for the school visits. Similarly, whilst the survey was carried out at WP, again, the predominance here was the school visits. In total, thirty surveys were completed at MLL; fifteen at WP. The findings of the survey are discussed in Chapter 6 where the complexities and contradictions of the consumption experience are analysed.

ii. Qualitative interviews

In-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with the 'producers' at each case study site. I use the term 'producer' as an all-encompassing category to refer to those responsible for constructing the displays and exhibitions (i.e. the curatorial staff). 'Producer' also applies to other museum personnel including those monitoring the visitors and school education programmes as well as to the demonstrators, role players and costumed workers who (as signalled in Chapter 5) themselves play a part in constructing museum displays and in *re*producing heritage experiences (through performance) for public consumption. These interviews were conducted to build production and consumption profiles of each site, and to find out more about the various roles within the sites. However, the data analysis has predominately been drawn from two key interviews: the printing demonstrator and a joint interview with two curators from the MLL. I interviewed the demonstrator to explore the construction of the printing workshop display, his perceptions on how this gallery experience is consumed by visitors, and also to uncover his own experiences of moving from working in a manufacturing industry to the service sector (see Appendix IV for interview

transcript). This information was complemented by the interview with the MLL curators, where the Printing History collection was discussed. However, the interview with the MLL curatorial staff was mainly concerned with exploring the development of the museum and the organisation of NMGM. It also allowed an insight into the concerns, perspectives and practices of the curators, unpacking for example, their attitudes to authenticity and exactitude in representation, key themes underpinning this study.

A considerable amount of time was devoted to obtaining the 'voices' of those who are drawn as consumers to representations of the past. I have already illustrated the use of the short visitor survey to 'access' these voices, but I was keen to delve much deeper into their perceptions and opinions (cf. Hudson, 1993) and so intensive, in-depth interviews with consumers were incorporated into the research. Interviews with visitors to MLL were carried out over a two month period (October and November 1998), during the week and also at weekends. Prior to commencing this phase of the study, I sought advice from Anne Pennington, Research Officer at NMGM, as to how I could create an environment within the museum which would persuade visitors to be interviewed. To this end, I arranged with the curatorial staff at MLL to use a room away from the main museum galleries, where I could take visitors to be interviewed and where I could also offer them tea/coffee and biscuits (as a bargaining tool) to persuade them to participate in the interview. I anticipated these interviews lasting much longer than the visitor questionnaire. Despite carrying out this research over a variety of days

and at weekends, it was still difficult to get people to agree to be interviewed. In the end, I interviewed fourteen visitors, either solo or in pairs. These interviews concentrated on finding out what people thought about the museum and the representations presented in the museum. Visitors were asked to comment on the different methods of presentation (in particular, the use of demonstrators and role players). These interviews also sought to gain an understanding of visitors perceptions of authenticity and the use of replicas in museums. I also asked them about how they view the role of museums in contemporary society.

Schools constitute a large percentage of visitors to museums and heritage centres. Prentice (1995) states that in the mid-1980s it was estimated that educational visits to heritage sites in England annually totalled over 12 million (5% of all recorded sightseeing visits). Clearly this is a significant group of people whose experiences and perceptions of 'history' and 'heritage' as presented at such themed sites should be documented in the research. As previously outlined, the 'general' visitor survey (when initially piloted) proved ineffective in soliciting children's views on their experiences of heritage. The only other conceivable way I could think of securing children's experiences of heritage was through targeting school visits. I thought this would be most effective if having spoken to the teacher regarding my intentions and gaining permission from them, I would visit the school prior to their visit to the heritage site. This visit would allow me to interview the children (either in pairs or in small groups), to ask them about their expectations of the visit; what they thought they might see; whether they had been

before, what they knew about the site; what they had done in class (if anything) leading up to the visit. Then, I would accompany the class on their visit in order to see what they did and observe their reactions to various exhibits, displays and demonstrations. Finally, I would return to the school the day after the visit to interview the children again, and ask about what they thought of the visit, what they liked, disliked, what they did, whether their expectations were met. These interviews with the children would allow a verbatim record of their comments on their visit to be made, and by accompanying them on their visit and with the follow-up interviews, I felt I would be able to contextualise these comments as I would understand what the children were commenting on or reacting to. Unfortunately, I experienced considerable difficulty in recruiting schools for this research. Several lines of enquiry were pursued in an attempt to obtain schools who were willing to participate in my research. I thought that the easiest way to recruit schools would be through targeting those which had already booked visits to the sites. For various reasons (primarily, the Data Protection Act) this information was not made available to me. As an alternative strategy it was suggested that I might get willing schools to participate in my research by placing a notice in the local authority education 'bulletins' (see Appendix V), yet this method again proved ineffectual. Hence, the last option was a general mailshot to schools in the Lancashire, Merseyside and Cheshire regions asking whether they were planning a visit to any of the case study sites and would be willing to participate in the research. Over 250 schools were contacted by letter, following

a random sample obtained from the Yellow Pages and Thomson Directory (March 1995).

Unfortunately this strategy also yielded little response as from the 250 schools and colleges contacted (Junior, Secondary and Further Education Colleges), only thirteen replies were received. In the end three schools were recruited to participate in the research - two junior schools were visiting Wigan Pier and one school was taking a class to Quarry Bank Mill. One school taking a party to the Albert Dock agreed to participate, but unfortunately, this coincided with prior arrangements I had made at QBM and could not be accommodated into the research. The visits took place during October and November 1995. From these three visits, I interviewed c. 60 children (a third being interviewed only once, after their visit, and two-thirds being interviewed twice, before and after their visit). Most of the children were interviewed in pairs, although some were interviewed in small groups of three and four. Interviewing children in these small groups adhered to the focus group method of enquiry, as the children, even in such small groups did discuss amongst themselves the questions posed and topics raised.

On one of the visits to WP, I was given the responsibility of taking a small group of children around the heritage centre. I found this an unexpected and 'nerve-wracking' experience. It was difficult observing the children, listening to them, and noting their comments on the exhibitions as I was more concerned about watching that I did not 'lose' any of the children, and also had to cope with one

boy being sick in the reconstructed coal mine. On the second visit to WP, I did manage to 'stand back' and observe the children, but the same difficulties of observing, listening and recording were again encountered. The visit to QBM did give me an opportunity to observe some of the children as they were taken around the site. Overall I did not feel that much of value came out of these participant observation sessions, the significance came from interviewing the children the following day after their visit. Comparing their accounts (before and after) and drawing the themes out of all three visits enabled me to 'make sense' of the children's experiences at consuming the representations of the past offered at QBM and WP.

iii. Focus groups

In this study I used the focus group method to investigate the production of the school workshops held at the Albert Dock, which were written and performed by a group of women from an adult education college. As the members of this adult education group had themselves *visited* MLL and the Albert Dock site as 'ordinary' visitors/consumers (rather than in their formal 'producer' role), I also wanted them to discuss their experiences of visiting the MLL. And so, through this focus group session I explored both production and consumption. It was thought that as a 'natural' group (cf. Krueger, 1994), the participants would be able, in discussion, to reflect on their past, shared experiences. Whilst the use of 'natural' groups has been critiqued because participants, in knowing one another, are viewed as responding to past events (Krueger, 1994), essentially this is what I

wanted the group to do, to talk about and reflect on how they came to produce their oral history workshops. The focus group method was chosen because the workshops had been constructed from the group's combined efforts, and I wanted them to comment - collectively - on their experiences of making sense of the past for school children to 'consume'. In this way, I thought the group dynamics would emerge as well as producing a deep and more nuanced account of their experiences.

Holbrook and Jackson (1996) state that there are benefits to be had in retaining the 'local context' as it helps to reduce the anxiety of focus group participants. I therefore arranged for the focus group to be held (August 1995) in the boardroom at the Merseyside Maritime Museum. The group were familiar with this museum as they had conducted their workshops in the Maritime Museum's Education Centre. I thought that the 'prestige' of the boardroom as a setting might signify to the group members the importance (to me) of what they have to say. I felt the 'anxiety' of my presence was lessened because I had telephoned all the participants prior to the discussion taking place. They had also been sent a letter and information about who I was.

This focus group was successful as the twelve participants seemed relaxed and eager to respond and the laughter which punctuated the discussion indicated to me that the group members did feel at ease. However in terms of transcription analysis the lack of a co-moderator meant that I was unable to record who was sat

where or recall their hand gestures or facial expressions. Also, given the large number of participants, I had difficulty in attributing quotations to specific members during the transcription process.

In a similar vein, I took a group of four people from Wigan to visit MLL (July, 1999) and on their return, I conducted a focus group discussion session with them. The intention of this group session was to access the voices of those visitors who had no connection to Liverpool. In effect, I was keen to explore how 'outsiders' may view and respond to the representations of Liverpool history offered for consumption at MLL. Here, questions included in this discussion centred on their prior perceptions of Liverpool, and then moved on to consider how the MLL's representations may have altered or shaped these perceptions. In this way, I was able to question whether 'local knowledge' was deemed to influence the readings of the museum exhibitions and displays. This group discussion also examined core themes central to this study, in particular notions of authenticity, the use of replicas, methods of representation and display and the role of museums in contemporary society.

As this group discussion was smaller than the adult education group, it was much easier to 'manage'. Group dynamics were evident even on this small scale, in particular the 'dominance' of one participant was noted. With fewer participants it was easier to observe body language and facial expressions and the transcription

was also a much more straightforward process: quotations could be attributed to individuals, unlike in the earlier adult education group discussion.

In January 1999, the curators at MLL used a market research company to carry out two focus group discussions. The curators wanted to find out about people's understandings of 'community' as this was going to be the central theme of a new gallery in the museum. Whilst I was unable to be an observer in these group sessions, the curatorial staff allowed me to sit in on the 'reporting back' session which occurred the day after these focus groups had taken place (see Appendix VI for field notes). This 'feedback session' was also attended by key members of the MLL/NMGM curatorial team and other NMGM personnel. From attending this group discussion, it was clear that in reporting back on the findings from these focus groups, the consultant did touch upon two key issues of concern to this current study: first in relation to the notion that museums were deemed to 'tell the truth', and second, regarding the storying of the built environment (see Chapter 4).

iv Participant observation

I have already mentioned that 'participant observation' was conducted during the school visits, as I observed the children on their visits to QBM and WP. Participant observation was also undertaken in other aspects of this study. For instance, I sat in on and observed several of the Wednesday afternoon curatorial 'surgery' sessions held at MLL (April - June 1995). These surgeries are an

opportunity for people to bring in artefacts to the museum that they want to know more about. The curatorial staff are on hand to look at these objects and either (based on their knowledge) tell them more about the object, or temporarily 'accession' the artefact and pass it on to another NMGM curator who is able to tell them more about it.

'Covert' participant observation sessions were carried out early in the research period as visits to MLL, QBM and WP. The aim was to observe how visitors 'consumed' the museums, and perhaps to record some of their comments on the exhibitions. However, this method did not prove very successful. First, I had difficulty in hearing how visitors reacted to the displays due to the fact that the museums all have their own (noisy) soundtracks: museums are no longer silent places. Despite conducting participant observation during 'busy' days (weekends) as well as during the week, they are also 'empty' places, in that it is difficult to become 'lost' in the crowd, and at times, I felt quite conspicuous and self-conscious as I took notes, since this is usually only done by children. Such feelings of 'exposure' and self-consciousness served to reveal my own lack of comfort with the role of participant observer.

However, despite these reservations and my initial difficulties with this method, I decided to *revise* my strategy rather than abandoning the method altogether. I decided, therefore, to focus on one display: the printer's workshop display in the MLL. This involved spending several days during April and May 1997, observing

visitors as they participated in a printing demonstration. The participant observation sessions were conducted on week days, at weekends and also on a Bank Holiday weekend. Interactions between the demonstrator and other museum personnel were also observed. This revised approach to the participant observation enabled me to record (in note form, via a field diary) the conversations the visitors had with the demonstrator, and also their comments to each other on leaving the printing gallery area. A short questionnaire relating to the printing display (see Appendix VII) was also drawn up and administered to a few visitors but it became evident that this had the effect of making them 'clam up' and I decided instead simply to observe. This modified and focused participant observation was an opportunity to observe, at close proximity the producer-consumer interface and social relations. It was a less 'conspicuous' way of observing visitors.

I gained permission from both the demonstrator and museum personnel to carry out this type of research. Inevitably, the consent of visitors could not be obtained without 'intruding' and altering the nature of their experiences; the effect of the questionnaire I briefly piloted made this clear. It is difficult to see how any of the participant observation could have any effect on the transitory visitors themselves since I made no direct contact with them, and the demonstrator did not make the visitors aware of my presence.

3.6 Justification of the qualitative research methods chosen

The methods undertaken in this study have been chosen to access the voices of those who produce and those who are drawn as consumers to heritage attractions.

There are numerous research methods texts outlining the benefits and limitations of using questionnaires and interviews in research projects, and offering advice on how to design surveys and conduct interviews (cf. Czaja and Blair, 1996; Gilbert, 1993; Lee, 1993; May, 1997; Robson, 1993). To this end, it is not necessary to rehearse the potentials and limitations of such research methods. For the purpose of this study, the emphasis was on constructing and conducting questionnaires and interviews which asked open-ended questions, giving respondents an opportunity to answer in their own words rather then offering them closed questions with the answer choices predetermined.

Participant observation is a research method which involves both participating in (experiencing) the social world of a community or group of people in order to obtain an understanding of what it is like to be part of such a world, and also stepping back from such immersion, to observe what is going on (Cook, 1997). Jorgensen (1989:12) identifies several situations in which the method of participant observation is a suitable approach to employ, including, when there are 'important differences between the views of insiders as opposed to outsiders ...' Clearly, in terms of the focus of the current study, the *differences* between insiders (the producers *and* consumers of representations of the past) and the

outsiders (critics) have yet to be established. Participant observation enables the social world of the museum to be entered and the assumptions of critics to be investigated empirically through close observation.

The merits of participant observation include the production of in-depth accounts through prolonged close contact with the group under study. This method provides an opportunity to obtain information and insights which would be unlikely to emerge from other research strategies such as questionnaires or interviews. However, in conducting participant observation it is necessary to consider how one 'enters' the social world that has attracted your attention. To this end, access has to be negotiated through establishing contacts (gatekeepers) to this particular world (in this case, curatorial staff). Undertaking a participant observation study involves a very strong sense of ethical responsibility and moral obligation (as is true of all research), particularly when it has to be decided whether overt or covert research is to be carried out. This is important as it firstly points to the power relations involved between researcher and researched; but also the 'effects' of the researcher, as Jorgensen (1989) notes that people behave differently when they are aware that they are being studied. For instance, the school children knew that I was observing them as they moved around the museum, and at times it was clear that the children were occasionally distracted by my presence. Smith (1988:24) highlights the significance of 'face-work' (Goffman, 1967) in any participant observation study, where 'the researcher [has] to set up through attitude, gesture and demeanour - a reputation'. Smith (1988)

argues that 'face-work' is a strategy which can enable the researcher to deal with the unexpected encounters which arise during field research.

In this study I have used participant observation as a key research strategy, primarily to attempt to obtain an 'insider' view of the production and consumption relationship. This method is less 'artificial' than interviews and questionnaires as the visitors who were observed at the printing display seemed unaware of my presence and I did not feel that their behaviour was affected by my presence (in contrast to some of the children on the school visits who knew that I was observing them).

In using this method, I have moved towards the ground of anthropological research practices. Participant observation (whether overt or covert) is viewed as a key research tool used by anthropologists as they seek to produce 'ethnographies', which offer an understanding of people's ways of life and cultural practices, obtained by lengthy immersions in distant places (and not-so-distant places, as Miller's (1998) recent ethnographic account of shoppers in London exemplifies). I have stressed the grounding of participant observation as a research tool in anthropology to highlight that whilst the method is becoming frequently utilised in the social sciences, it is necessary to show a sensitivity to the subtleties and different ways that such a method can be conducted. For instance, in my attempts at using participant observation, I became 'immersed' for only very short periods of time, in fact, I would question whether indeed 'immersion' is

the appropriate word to use, as I feel that I simply conducted 'discrete' observation sessions.

The strengths of the participant observation method became evident on revising the strategy (i.e. by focusing down and observing the printing display rather than trying to take in the whole museum). This method proved fruitful in terms of seeing the performative strategies played out by the demonstrator (and also visitor responses to them) and comments were overheard which I do not feel would have been made or picked up via conventional interviewing or questionnaire methods. The limitation of participant observation was the inability for it to be successfully applied to all sites and the whole of the site, not just a 'microcosm' of the heritage attraction. I did not feel that I had become an 'insider' within this social world of the museum environment. The method was just another way of accessing visitor voices and observing relations with producers: looking at the producer/consumer interface.

The focus group methodology has its roots in market research (Krueger, 1994), and in recent years the practice has emerged as a seemingly favoured 'new' method for social scientists, including geographers (cf. Holbrook and Jackson, 1996). According to Krueger (1994:6) a focus group is a 'carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment'. To this end, through the skill of a moderator (the researcher) the focus group discussion can be directed around a

series of topics and questions. The moderator's role is to initiate the conversation, and to either probe (for example, when a particularly interesting and unexpected angle or argument is emerging), or to steer the discussion back on course if it begins to deviate. The strength of the focus group method is that it offers a different and deeper dimension to the research, for example it allows the study of group dynamics, producing insights and information which would probably not be obtained from one-to-one interviews or questionnaire based methods. Hence, focus groups have been utilised in this study in a variety of ways, in conjunction with questionnaires and interviews to uncover much deeper insights than more conventional methods.

Reviewing the focus group method, Goss (1996) maintained that practitioners advocated a series of 'golden rules' to follow, including an 'optimum' number of participants, ideally conducted serially, with the participants being strangers and chosen because of some common characteristic. Krueger argues that conducting focus groups with people that know each other poses a problem because 'they may be responding more on past experiences, events or discussions than on the immediate topic of concern' (1994:18). Krueger advises a series of focus groups taking place because he feels that 'solo focus groups are risky because occasionally moderators will encounter 'cold groups' - groups in which participants are quiet and seemingly reluctant to participate' (1994:17). Clearly, from the focus group sessions undertaken in this study, 'natural' groups worked very well, and did so on a variety of scales (from three and four participants, to a

group of twelve). The focus group method lends itself to modification, suiting the parameters of the study being undertaken.

Holbrook and Jackson's study on shopping activities included focus group research methods; they argued that such a method 'can produce novel or unexpected insights which may not be generated by other methodologies' (1996:136). Holbrook and Jackson (1996) feel that there are benefits to be gained from using one-off focus groups in certain situations given the time-consuming nature of recruiting and conducting focus group research. For Holbrook and Jackson, there may be no other option than having to conduct a focus group with participants who know each other, and they argue that such 'acquaintanceship' can be accommodated in this method. Holbrook and Jackson (1996:137) refer to Kitzinger's (1994) work on 'natural groups' arguing that acquaintanceship was advantageous as participants could 'relate to each others' comments on actual incidents in their shared daily lives'. As mentioned earlier, the adult education focus group enabled all project members to participate in a discussion of issues surrounding the construction and reproduction of the workshops.

The focus group method was another successful strategy where allowing the conversation to flow among the group members led to areas of conflict and contestation, disagreement and debate being disclosed amongst the group participants which I doubt could have emerged by any other method of enquiry. The focus group method highlights the weaknesses of one-to-one research

methods (used to obtain visitor responses): the group situation allows intra-group debates to be expressed. The limitations of the method occurred when it came to transcribing the tape-recording of the discussions (for instance, with one group consisting of twelve participants all sounding alike, it was impossible to attribute quotations to an individual).

3.7 Data analysis and organisation

The qualitative data collected (interview transcripts, completed questionnaire surveys, participant observation field notes, focus group transcripts) has all been subject to detailed thematic analysis. In Chapter 4, in unpacking the three 'bases to authenticity' as sources of truth, I relied on secondary sources of information, such as Quarry Bank Mill's Interpretation Manual (1994). However, in examining oral history as a source of truth, evidence was drawn from the adult education group discussion and the printing demonstrator interview. In Chapter 5, I explore the construction of two museum 'texts': the school workshop sessions and the printing display. As such, I utilised information gained from the adult education group, the printing demonstrator and also the interview with MLL curatorial staff. In considering the notion of authenticity and the use of replicas in museums, evidence from the in-depth visitor interviews is presented. Finally, in Chapter 6, in advancing an understanding of the construction of meaning in the experiencing of museum representations, I have drawn upon all the different sources of information gathered.

Chapter 4: Museum as Ethnography

> '[Museum] exhibitions are constructions ... [The] end of this construction is to persuade, to render 'natural' or 'innocent' what is profoundly 'constructed' and 'motivated'' (Lidchi, 1997:179).

4.1 Introduction

As 'sites of representation' (Duncan, 1993) museums attempt to make sense of the past for public consumption. This chapter considers the notion of museums as being 'ethnographies', as *writing* or producing the past.

The 'crisis of representation' (Marcus and Fischer, 1986) signalled recognition amongst scholars that ethnographies, are fictions: constructed and partial (Ley and Duncan, 1993). This is an issue for museums, too, which are traditionally regarded as custodians of the 'truth'. To this end, I question what such challenges to representation hold for public understanding and consumption, of other times and places presented within museums. To frame an examination of the museum as a space of contestation, in this chapter I ask, where does truth reside? I argue that there are three possible bases of authenticity at such sites, where truth might be thought to be 'grounded'. These gateways to the past are: the built environment (truth written in the stones - or other artefacts which can be 'touched'); oral history (truth in voices); and expert history (truth uncovered and preserved through curatorial skill and knowledge).

Whilst Chapter 2 identified three different theories of representation (Hall, 1997) -- the reflective, intentional and constructionist approaches -- in this chapter, I develop the argument that these 'gateways to the past' are mediated, and demonstrate how all three 'gateways' should be viewed from the constructionist perspective (cf. Lidchi, 1997).

4.2 Gateways to the past I: the built environment

In accessing the past, little can compare to the connection that can be made by 'being there', not, of course, in time, but in *place*. There is a profound sense that the truth is somehow embedded in the experience of going to see the 'real' thing, or being able to touch the 'actual' one. The truth is written into the artefacts, whether they are micro-artefacts (such as, a tool) or macro-artefacts (for example, a building) and a 'real' sense of connecting to the past is conveyed by touching the actual, authentic 'stone'. This part of the chapter focuses on artefacts as an opening to the past, where truth is located. In this respect, the truth resides in the objects; the objects *write* the past; the objects are an ethnography.

An extreme example of this is described by Wainwright (1997) in his discussion of Haworth in Yorkshire, a village made famous through the Bronte sisters. One of the key features of the village is its steeply sloped, cobble stoned main street. The cobble stoned street is notable, authentic testimony to the Bronte sisters' time in Haworth: the sisters having walked upon these stones. Walking on the very same stones can be seen as a connection with the past and to the Brontes (in the same way, for example, as touching one of their manuscripts). In recent times, this

connection to the past was disrupted as the cobbled street had to be dug up to lay new telephone wires. To this end, the opportunity of having the uneven cobblestones straightened (or even resurfacing the street) was refused. Each stone's position was videoed and, when lifted, numbered, its exact location mapped and then replaced as if it had never been disturbed (Wainwright, 1997).

This event illustrates the problems with a notion of authenticity which focuses on artefacts. Undoubtedly, the stones, either individually as micro-artefacts or collectively as a macro-artefactual street, are still the same ones. The stones are 'authentic', insofar as the truth is that they would at one time, have been walked on by the Brontes. Yet, despite the fact that they have been returned to their 'exact' same position, they have been disturbed and the street has been reconstructed *by different hands*. Is this *really* the same street that the Bronte sisters walked along: did the hands that moved those stones sever the connection to the past and also displace the truth? For visitors who seek to access the truth by *being* in Haworth, the built environment is now a potential space of contestation: will they be told that the stones have been lifted? And will it matter to them?

Clearly, the actual locations of the sites addressed in this thesis have themselves got a 'past'. Prior to being made over into a heritage site, the sites themselves have their own 'biographies': they have a past to be written, an *ethnography*, which is held in tension with their present role. The Albert Dock area of Liverpool was once the focus of industrial maritime trade, in contrast to its contemporary

role as a tourist attraction. Similarly, Wigan's canal basin was the pivot for the town's industry, transporting coal, cotton and other goods along the Leeds-Liverpool Canal. Nowadays, the canal is used by tourists. Quarry Bank Mill was a force in the cotton trade, and whilst it remains a 'working' cotton mill, it is in a somewhat reduced version of its former industrious capacity. Such initial uses of the sites, I argue, can be said to be the 'primary' history of the site. However, the site itself cannot reveal process without interpretation (as Barnes and Duncan (1992:2) maintain, there is no 'pre-interpreted reality'), and so there is no sense in which truth can be directly accessed. And, therefore, such an assertion renders moot the notion of 'truth' reflected in objects because *interpretation* from some source is required to unlock the meaning ('truth') in the artefacts.

The built environment (as macro-artefact) offers a doorway to the past, where the truth resides in the touching of stones. Medium and message here are intertwined. Yet, museums are often constructed on sites of production or circulation, 'made over' into sites for consumption. The primary history of such chosen sites is mediated when the sites are made over. The function of the sites has been altered from sites of industrial production to sites storying industry for tourist education, entertainment and consumption. In simply 'being there', is this enough for visitors to be able to recognise that the site was once for example, a significant place in maritime history. And so, given this conflict between 'then' and 'now', it is necessary to consider what the primary history of the sites studied has been and examine whether this 'base of authenticity' has been included in contemporary representations of the past at each site.

'The Way We Were' is the name of the heritage centre located in Wigan, on the banks of the Leeds-Liverpool canal. Hannavy notes the role the canal has played in shaping Wigan's industrial landscape:

> 'The canal changed Wigan. In the decades which followed its construction, its route through the town dictated the siting and development of the major centres of manufacturing ... The factories and mills which were built along its towpath in the nineteenth century would never have been built there - might never have been built in Wigan - had the canal not been built' (1990: 75).

Gradually the importance of the canal diminished due to the demise of the traditional coal and cotton industries and from the competition of other modes of transportation such as road and rail (Wigan M.B.C., n.d.:10). Until the mid-1970s the site, known locally as the Wigan Pier Basin, was no more than an eyesore - a collection of derelict canalside wharf buildings. The canal was home to discarded shopping trolleys and the area was considered bleak, abandoned and dangerous. The 1980s saw the transformation of the site into a leading heritage tourist attraction.

As a testimony to the demise of Wigan's industrial strength, the decline of the coal and textiles industries and canal transportation, one could question whether the area needed to be made over for this story to be told. Was this derelict landscape not more 'real' or true than any heritage centre would be able to convey? The threat of buildings collapsing through such decay, it was argued, would have been a 'great loss to the heritage of Wigan' (Wigan M.B.C., n.d.: 10).

At the same time as saving Wigan's past, attempts were being made to reinvent the town's image (following a feasibility study commissioned to assess the possibility of a 'make over'):

> 'The name Wigan Pier is an inestimably valuable marketing asset, which should be exploited. To do so will turn the old joke round, and improve Wigan's image far more effectively than attempting to bury it would' (Brown, 1983:3).

> 'Few people have knowingly visited Wigan Pier; the image is just due to reputation. Once people do start to come though they will see a new, fine reality. The famous name will come to be associated with the Heritage Centre, and the new Pier, rather than with the old. The Pier project is thus capable, not only of cashing in on the Wigan Pier name, but of turning the image on its head' (ibid.: 10).

The renovation of the site was an attempt to make the area once again the source of the town's economic regeneration, through the construction of a spectacular tourist attraction. Comparing the Wigan Pier Basin before and after its renovation, it is clear that a selective interpretation of the past for contemporary public consumption has been constructed: a very different version of the past with a different visual impact has been produced. Visitors to the heritage centre are initially confronted with a reference to the canal and the role it played in the Wigan Pier 'joke' (which is believed to have involved the mistaken impression of Wigan having a seaside pier, when the canal basin had flooded). Visitors then encounter the 'Wakes Weeks' display which tells the story of Wiganers' annual seaside holidays. Here, one is supposed to make the connection between the implausibility (and humour?) of Wigan as having the equivalent of a seaside pier.

The heritage centre has compiled a free 'guide' sheet that visitors can use to organise their visit around the centre. The site has already been structured and conditioned, and again, visitors are now being offered the opportunity of having

their visit mediated through a guide. Visitors are instructed to 'walk past the canal basin model' in order for them to arrive at the 'Walking Day' set. Having finished the self-directed tour, visitors are encouraged to visit 'the replica pier to see what all the fuss was about'. At the foot of the guide sheet, next to the logo, visitors are encouraged to 'Come join the fun!' The significance of the canal has been trivialised by these throw-away references.

Outside the heritage centre, visitors 'encounter' the canal in different ways. Primarily it is via gazing on the canal as they walk along the towpath or as they take an 'inter-site' pleasure trip on the waterbuses. The canal is seemingly stripped of its former uses: it is seen for pleasure rather than industry. Visitors gaze on a tidy, cleansed, conifered, pleasant canal 'walk'. But who built, excavated and constructed the canal and buildings? Whose labour shaped and influenced the past and the present? How is the significance ('truth') about the canal's importance to Wigan's growth, demise (and re-birth?) conveyed to visitors? The heritage centre is set as 'life in the year 1900' and so one could concede that such information would be out of time or context given such period fixity (the canal having been constructed much earlier). Yet the selectivity of the contemporary representation of Wigan's history suggests that 'truth' is no longer reflected in the built environment. The contemporary makeover has constructed Wigan's past and subverted the 'truth'. In this respect, the tension between former and present uses has significant implications for any evaluation of contemporary experiences of the site.

In contrast to Wigan Pier, at Quarry Bank Mill, a working textile museum, located in the Bollin Valley, Cheshire, the importance of the site's location, and the stages of the Mill's development (into a 'factory colony'), demise and re-emergence as a working museum are stressed throughout the site. Clearly, such an urban-industrial 'feature' as a cotton mill could be seen as being out-of-place in such an idyllic rural setting and requiring explanation for visitors. The site tells how the paternalistic ideology of the Greg family influenced the development of the village of Styal and the surrounding landscape into a factory colony. Visitors are informed about the physical factors which contributed to the Mill's location, such as the role of the River Bollin in powering the Mill's machinery.

This information is relayed to visitors through the individual exhibitions themselves, such as the 'Water Power' gallery which describes how water energy was harnessed at the Mill, but also through for example, the 'talking map', a scale model of the whole site where a pre-recorded commentary informs visitors about the various aspects of the mill site, allowing visitors to visualise the whole Mill landscape. The mill 'guides' (volunteers) are another source of information for visitors about the significance of the mill site. The guide's information relayed to visitors has been conditioned through the Interpretation Manual (1994) which has been compiled by the museum curators:

> 'This manual is for all the people who demonstrate, interpret and guide at Quarry Bank Mill. Its aim is to help to improve each visitor's experience of the Mill ... Quarry Bank Mill has a complicated story to tell. It is important that **as a team** we all tell a consistent story' (Interpretation Manual, 1994: Introduction; their emphasis).

The Manual suggests that there is one 'true' story (a fixed representation) which the curatorial staff have brought together via the Manual, to help (instruct?) the

guides to convey. The curatorial staff are aiming for *consistency* in the stories that the guides tell to visitors. The site's development (if not actual brick by brick construction) is intrinsic to the experience offered for public consumption. Quarry Bank Mill has an extensive archive of information on the workers and apprentices of the Mill, some of this information has been included in the Interpretation Manual (1994) which the volunteer guides can draw on. Clearly, the 'expert' knowledge has mediated both the built environment and the oral history. Clearly, also, such mediation positions these representations as adhering to the constructionist perspective (cf. Hall, 1997). The Interpretation Manual (1994) exemplifies curatorial endeavours to condition both oral history and the built environment in the production of representations of the past. Moreover, through the Manual there is an attempt to influence or control visitor experiences of these representations through the emphasis on consistent stories. In a sense, the Manual, as a curatorial tool, effectively reinforces the 'mass culture critique' within the cultural industries: controlling and manipulating production for consumption (cf. Mackay, 1997; Negus, 1997), although what the actual *effect* is on consumers cannot be assumed.

In contrast to Quarry Bank Mill, the Museum of Liverpool Life says very little about the 'primary' history of the Museum's location in Liverpool's dockland area. Within the Albert Dock museum complex, the history of the docks and maritime trade are predominantly focused in the Merseyside Maritime Museum, the Ships and Quayside and Piermaster's House. Whilst the docks are included in the 'Making a Living' gallery in the Museum of Liverpool Life, the actual building

in which the MLL is housed has not been interpreted by the curatorial staff for public consumption:

> DB: 'Does [the museum building itself] have any role to play in the representation of Liverpool's history?'
>
> Curator, MLL: 'I think it does. I think we are very bad in museums where we use these historic buildings, we as inheritors of these buildings, know about their history but we don't bother to tell the public about their history (laughter), and I think that's something we should put right. Erm, what we haven't done for example at the Maritime site, which you can see in other cities like Hull or Portsmouth is interpretation, is the interpretation of the environment and the landscape and ambience and we don't do that ... there ... I hope, one thing that we did have planned within the next phase is that we would be interpreting the view from the window of the Pilotage building upstairs which is a great big view of the city, which makes this point of Liverpool history juxtaposed between the city and the river, the city owes its business to the river. Erm, but I think these subtleties that we dream up and indeed to rationalise our sort of actions are lost really'.

It is striking that the curators admit that they do not always tell the public about the history of buildings which house their representations. However, one conclusion drawn from the focus group sessions (commissioned by MLL and conducted by The Susie Fisher Group (January, 1999)) was the apparent disinterest amongst visitors towards the built environment. In these discussions, it was suggested that noting architecture or a building's 'bricks and mortar' would not gain an 'emotional response' from visitors. Stories centred within or around buildings were deemed more interesting and more likely to gain an emotional 'pull' from visitors (see Appendix VI). Moreover, the issue of telling/not telling again indicates the curatorial control of the stories presented within museums. And yet, some visitors have their own knowledge about the site and are able to draw on living memory and experience to story the past around the site: these visitors do not necessarily require curatorial interpretations.

So far, I have concentrated on unpacking 'truth' in macro-artefacts (whole sites/buildings), I now turn to consider 'truth' in micro-artefacts. Recalling their childhood memories of visiting museums, the adult education group members suggested that to have the ability to see the objects and to read their labels was the only skill necessary to 'experience' such places. The visitor's gaze did no more than move from object to label, and then move onto the next artefact. Here, the trope of 'passive observation' characterises this once conventional museum behaviour. Explanation of the objects in these museums, according to the group, was minimal, and therefore an obstacle to 'making sense' of the displays and artefacts as the 'truth' (meaning) is not necessarily reflected in the object *or* label. In contrast, museums in contemporary society have recognised the need for a 'multi-sensory' approach to museum experiences and interpretation. Now, the trope of 'active engagement' signifies changes in the way contemporary museums approach the representing (writing) of times past. Museums offer exhibitions which artefacts can be seen, handled or discussed:

> 'Well you can *see* all the artefacts can't you? [And] in *most cases you can handle* them which is a good thing ...' (Adult education group member, my emphasis);

> '... and also to make it interesting with somebody who [will] actually *discuss* what the item was, when it was used, how it was used, where in fact a lot of museums ... like the main museum in Liverpool was a wonderful place to me [but] once you had seen everything, pictures of dinosaurs or objects that *you could look at but not touch* ... where in Liverpool Life Museum there is a great deal of life involved with explanations ...' (Adult education group member, my emphasis).

The transformation of contemporary museums into 'multi-sensory' places of learning and investigation (touch, handle, interrogate) is a stark contrast to the distant and visual dimension of experiencing museums, as recollected by the group members.

The group also suggested that museums are the eventual 'resting' place for objects. It is as though their journey of 'passing through history' ends there when the objects find refuge and sanctuary in a museum environment. But, is 'resting' an appropriate term for such objects? The Albion Printing Press in the printing gallery of the MLL is far from 'rested': the press now prints souvenir certificates for visitors (see Chapter 5). In contrast to their 'traditional' functions, museum objects are given new or slightly modified roles, for example, the printing press *still prints* but in a slower and more demonstrative capacity rather than in its former industrial 'role'. The artefacts are to be touched and the truth is reflected in seeing their function. However, as this is carried out in a museum and not a factory (or suchlike) environment, then the truth is slightly deflected and mediated.

The purpose of this section has been to examine the notion of objects (micro and macro) as sources of 'truth', and to consider whether meaning is *reflected* (cf. 'mimetic' theory, Barnes and Duncan, 1992) in these objects (simply 'being there' or in the 'touching' of them). However, from the evidence presented it is clear that the 'reflective' theory of representation is not sustainable as artefacts require interpretation (they need storying) from some source (such as experts or oral history) for sense to be made and understood and for the 'truth' to emerge. To this end, 'truth' in stones is aligned to the 'constructionist' theory of representation.

4.3 Gateways to the past II: oral history

> '...also the local life is based on ordinary people *as well* that have worked in the factories like Meccano, Plessey and Tate and Lyle, *got first hand views of people who worked on the machines, so that gives you a true insight...*' (Adult education group member, my emphasis).

Oral history is 'verbal artefact' where the truth appears to be written into the spoken testimony of lived experience: listening to voices is another gateway to the past. Thompson notes the benefits and limitations of oral history, particularly, as set against so-called 'official' history:

> 'Oral history by contrast makes a much *fairer trial* possible: *witnesses* can now also be called from the under-classes, the unprivileged, and the defeated. It provides a more realistic and fair reconstruction of the past, a challenge to the established account' (Thompson, 1988:6, my emphasis).

Thompson implies that oral historians can put 'official' history on trial, as they bring to court witnesses to bygone times, who are 'digging out' the truth from their memories. Those with 'stories' to tell are considered as having the authentic voice and offering a true connection to the past: intended meanings conveyed through their voices. It is apparent that those who recall their memories (write the past) firmly believe that they are telling the truth. There is a conviction written into their testimonies that they are telling it like it was:

> 'They are actually being shown the true picture of our lives ... as it was, by real people, who were there then, and who are here now ... [to] ... sort of, relay their experiences ...' (Adult education group member).

Thompson (1988:5) argues that oral history offers a 'new dimension' to history: truth from lived experience. The telling of life histories involves the storying of objects, and whilst the previous section argued that 'truth' was said to reside in the touching of 'stones', the built environment is a silent landscape; through oral history, stories can be woven around such macro (and micro) artefacts. Moreover,

people may recall their experiences of using artefacts that have not survived (cf. Porter, 1988); or similarly, recollect customs or events that have gradually faded out or have no documentation remaining in the present. 'New' ethnographies can be offered, as the personal experience of 'being there' in the past, and still 'being here' in the present provides the bond of authenticity and connection to the truth. For example,

> 'Well I went to Liverpool Life Piermaster's House because as a child my father worked for J and B, William Middleton and Son in Maryland Street which was a haulage contractors, then they moved on to James Newton and Son, my life, my childhood was down at the dock with my dad at the Piermaster's house collecting the ropes, the bells, going on this lorry, going on trips... I... I lost my mother when I was 8 so if I was to be left alone and if my father was to work 'til 10 he would get permission from school to take me with him to Wales, and we would come down there and pick up all these things on the docks and the docker's life ... I just, actually seeing it all I wanted to get that over to my grandchildren so that was the reason I went down to Liverpool Life to show them and also the house was like the house I grew up in, only ours was only a 2 up, and 2 down, not quite that big but all of the things were there, the old mangle, the little Anderson sink, be like, how the hell can you wash [laughter] - your boiler with posser in and the boiler that you had to light the fire and you can tell your grandchildren things and hope that they try and get a picture of it, but unless they actually see it so that's the reason I went there' (Adult education group member).

Clearly, the grandmother, recalling her childhood down at the docks, breathes life and authenticity into the built environment and artefacts for her grandchildren. She has peeled back the layers of interpretation that the museum has displayed, to weave her own stories around these 'stones'. Here, it is possible to draw on the 'intentional' theory of representation (Hall, 1997), where meaning is thought to be imposed on the object by the author (speaker). The author (as representer) stories the objects - the author (as speaker) gives meaning to the objects, therefore the author is the source of 'truth'. And so, for her, the docks (the *place*) is where the truth resides, not the contemporary museums; she is able to offer her own interpretations for her grandchildren. Personal experiences and encounters of such macro and micro artefacts bring a sense of legitimacy to these

attempts at writing the past. These ethnographies are seen as authentic because the actual teller has 'been there' at that particular time, and therefore, 'truth' is written in the voice of the experienced. It is also apparent that the grandmother is aware of the limitations of her storytelling capabilities, and possibly, of how such stories are read (consumed) by the children ('...you can tell your grandchildren things and hope that they try and get a picture of it...'). However, this process is more complex than simply 'telling it like she remembers it': her account is *constructed* out of the framework in which she finds herself. In the example above, the grandmother's childhood memories of the dock area are a 'text', that is almost *verbally* written as she moves around the dockland environment with her grandchildren. The grandmother is author, the meanings inherent in the buildings materialise in her words as she responds to this environment: the 'truth' is revealed in the storying of these macro/micro artefacts. Furthermore, this illustrates the 'pleasures of consumption' (Mackay, 1997) thesis in practice. For the grandmother, it is not the curatorial representations within the new museums where truth resides, it is the place and her memories of the place which turn the grandmother into an active and empowered consumer, producing meaning for her grandchildren. However, even in this example, ultimately, the grandmother as 'author' cannot control her grandchildren's reception (or 'reading') of her stories (cf. Barnes and Duncan, 1992).

Oral history is not without its critics who perceive 'flaws' in the validity of such ethnographies. First, oral history has been accused of romanticism, where bygone times are seen through a soft-focus lens and the 'bad' times are cast under the

umbrella of the 'good old days'. As Finnegan (1997:72) notes, life stories, as personal narratives, tend to follow certain conventions, including '...the fall from grace, from the golden age of true community and harmony to the woes of the present'. Lowenthal (1985) has remarked on the failings of the mind, what he terms the 'malleability of memory', where the actual distance of the past has shaped contemporary recollections of times past.

Another weakness of oral history is in the way that artefacts or experiences once taken for granted (in everyday use, as nothing 'special') have now become revered and remembered with affection. For example, the adult education group members recalled as children, 'bath night' and making 'rag rugs', they were remembered as 'events', when at the time, they were conducted out of necessity and hardship during the war or due to lack of technological advances rather than with any fondness. To this end, one can begin to question what kind of truth is emerging from such ethnographies.

A third criticism of the notion of oral history as a valid gateway to the truth is that, in producing their life stories, the narrators unconsciously impose mediations, structures and conventions upon their own narrations:

> 'In this story-based view of the self, the individual story-tellers are viewed as at once drawing on narrative conventions - a kind of art form - to realise their stories of the self, and as being creative and artistic actors themselves in the production of culture' (Finnegan, 1997:69).

Therefore, there is a suggestion that as people begin to tell their 'history', or write their past, they are doing so within the boundaries of certain cultural traditions, unaware that this is what they are doing: their ethnographies are mediated. For

Finnegan (1997) such 'conventions' include personal narratives as containing accounts of heroism, being victims or seeking a change over time such as from 'deprivation/suffering/immaturity, to riches/happiness/maturity' (1997:73).

One of the opportunities to encounter oral history at the Museum of Liverpool Life is through the workshops put on for school children which have been both written and performed by a group of women who happened to meet via an adult education course. The workshops have focused on history subjects and themes from the National Curriculum. The VE Day workshop, for example, originated from the Curriculum's emphasis on studying war time. The group had completed various local history courses at college, gradually acquiring strong interests in women's history in Liverpool. Whilst students at the college the group wrote and published several booklets about women's history; wrote and performed local radio programmes on these issues; produced and performed workshops in schools; and then eventually formalised their own group, loosened their ties to the college, and organised children's workshops at the Albert Dock.

An examination of some of the motives and attitudes of group members highlights some of the issues around the way 'truth' is constructed in oral history. For many of the women, their return to education followed a significant life event such as the death of a partner. There was, for such members, a realisation that life was short and needed to be lived to the full. One member in particular, spoke of her retirement years as offering a chance to fulfil earlier missed opportunities in her

life; unable to continue her schooling, she felt that her educational potential had never been fully realised:

> '... and I left school the day I was 14 very, very reluctantly because I think I had more in me ... at the time you did what you were told to do in those days. Your mother said you left school, you left school and she needed money towards the rent etc... so I always felt there was a big gap I've never had a chance to show what I could do if you like and I thought and well this is a chance ...' (Adult education group member).

Some of the group members seemed to have returned to education as a kind of challenge to society's perception of elderly *women*:

> 'all they've done is boost my confidence so it ... it's far better than playing bingo and erm I've really enjoyed the company and what we're doing I've really enjoyed...' (Adult education group member);'not only just with the friendship with the ladies as well and as well as keeping my brain alive as I don't like going to bingo [laughter]'(Adult education group member).

The group's rejection by the group of conforming to the cultural stereotype of elderly women and bingo seems to indicate that the group are positioning themselves in terms of *what* they expect people to feel about them. Moreover, their return to education could be seen as an attempt to either reaffirm their identity (in seeking to finally fulfil long-held personal beliefs and goals) or even to carve out another identity (as educator?) in taking up a new role in their lives. Through oral history, the group claim and believe that they have a unique and useful role in society. They have knowledge of the past, gained from direct, lived experience which can be perceived as authentic, true and real (they have 'been there'). Their representations of the past, born out of such direct experience led them to believe that their ethnographies are legitimate and valid:

> 'They are actually being shown the *true* picture of our lives ... as it was, by real people, who were there then, and who are here now ... [to] ... sort of, relay their experiences ...' (Adult education group member, my emphasis); '... but I think all of us including Lil and myself give something also back to, you know as becoming a group, *knowing all about this*, that and the other we are also able to learn and to give information to people and to learn from their experience as well and we've all got different lives and you know *we've all had different lives* but we have a common thing in that Women's History ...' (Adult education group member, my emphasis).

They all have different lives to write (represent), and through the group they are able to recount their past, as a collective ethnography.

The initial suggestion to attend history courses was met with hostility, so it was necessary for some of the women to confront their own perceptions and prejudices surrounding history as a 'school subject':

> '...I pulled a face because History to me was King Alfred burning the cakes, Bodaccia, Queen Elizabeth and knighthoods and all this... tripe and I didn't fancy it at all and then we realised that *ordinary* people have lives and *ordinary* people make history and that to me is, is really wonderful ...' (Adult education group member, my emphasis); '...the difference was when we went to school it was talked at us ['it was drummed into...'] and we had to remember dates and er which king came after which king ...' (Adult education group member).

Clearly, some members of the group still held notions of history as consisting of the same 'great national events and people scenario' remembered from their school days; and that her face was 'pulled' indicating a sense of dislike, in terms of her perception that the content and teaching methods would still be the same. This reluctance to enrol for history courses because of their own memories of history at school was echoed by other members of the group:

> 'I've studied so much about ... British history but nothing in relation to where I was actually born and my own roots ...' (Adult education group member); 'I was born in Birmingham but I've lived some years in Liverpool and I love Liverpool and erm it's gave me a *better* perspective of Liverpool ... at school you only get about battles and kings and queens, but erm in Women's History we've got the grassroots and we've *made it very interesting*...' (Adult education group member, my emphasis).

The significance of this positioning by the group members of these establishments and the teaching and content of history becomes apparent when one considers how they shaped their school workshops (at the museum). There is a strong belief amongst the group that they were portraying 'grassroots' history, reflecting the

ordinary history and ordinary lives, in particular, almost as a reaction to this 'official' version. Whilst this history was certainly 'grassroots', in that it was written about their lives, it was far from 'ordinary': their ordinary lives were very 'eventful' lives. The group storied themselves in terms of noteworthy events or things happening to them which were extra-ordinary. Here it is necessary to problematise the notion that 'ordinary people have lives and make history' because the mundaneness of everyday living in such representations is not told. The group's childhoods were extraordinary times (living through the war) but the elements of ordinariness are absent. It is quite significant that one of the members should comment that they have 'made it very interesting', firstly because mundane (everyday) is not necessarily 'interesting', and secondly, that 'official' history to them, is equally not very interesting. Furthermore, their eventful and extra-ordinary lives have become interesting through what Finnegan has termed 'a process of creative retrospection' (1997:88). The workshops were structured around a series of scenes (depicting childhood in the 1930s or VE Day), very much as a series of events, in the same way that they themselves had been taught history at school. Following the 'creative retrospection' process, these stories of 'extraordinary living' are 'partial truths': selective and constructed.

Whilst these 'culturally expected features' (Finnegan, 1997:77) could be perceived as rose-tinted romanticism ('really wonderful') the group tried to convey a plurality of perspectives, rather than simply a 'soft-focus' view of the past. This was noticeable in their account of war time:

'Everybody had a job, some people quite frankly were better off during the war...'

> 'So there was this feeling that war was good, ['some'] for my family, even though it was horrible as well, it did bring employment.'
> 'What happened at home is never mentioned either is it... it's only the slaughter that's glorified.'
> 'That's why this form of history, with the children is real.'
> 'Yes, good....that's the satisfaction I get...' (Adult education group members).

Despite these efforts to portray multiple perspectives (within their collective ethnography) I feel that there is still an underlying suggestion that the group want their 'form' of history to be accepted by the children, in preference to 'official' school history. By offering a 'grassroots' version of the past, it is almost a direct challenge to the 'official' version, rather than simply another version of the past.

Finnegan (1997) and Thompson (1988) both argue that oral history is mediated:

> '... we cannot just take life stories as the 'natural' and unmediated effusions of asocial individuals.... They remain uniquely personal, it is true - but they also deploy recognised cultural conventions' (Finnegan 1997:78).

> 'In most work of this kind, [oral history / community drama] however, although the words and even the acting have come from local people, the essential direction has remained in other hands. If there was a common purpose, it was one imposed from without' (Thompson, 1988:15).

For Thompson (1988), oral history is open to conditioning, from 'without', whilst Finnegan (1997) suggests oral history is subject to mediation from 'within'(internalised conventions). The research has found evidence to support both these claims. To this end, it is necessary to examine the implications of this conditioning particularly in terms of oral history as a base to authenticity and a gateway to the past.

The school workshops held at the MLL are attempts to write the past which have been conditioned from both 'within' and 'without'. The adult education courses where the group members initially came together is perhaps the most obvious and

influential source of *external* mediation. There is a feeling among the women that the group's activities at the museum workshops are the result of a two-way process.

The history courses that the women participated in, reawakened and focused their attention back on their own memories of times past. In this way, the college motivated and guided the group, providing them with the skills to structure their knowledge and write their pasts to share with others. The college encouraged the women's individual desire and ability to structure their 'buried' knowledge (regained? never lost?), and to come together, to produce a collective ethnography, a shared sense of bygone times. To this end, the college was cultivating the oral historian within them, where their stories of the past can be 'mobilised' across generations.

However, one can question what the college's influence has been on the authenticity of the ethnographies produced. By showing the group how to structure their memories, and also where to look to fill in the gaps, this mediation (or interference) can be viewed as severing the women's connection to the past as their personal narratives are tainted. Clearly, these workshops are products of 'intertextuality' (Barnes and Duncan, 1992). The workshops are a 'text' to be read (consumed) by schoolchildren; moreover, they have been constructed in part, from the 'texts' that the college has produced to help the group structure their personal narratives as well as their own memories (as texts). The college have aided or collaborated with the group to enable them to produce a workshop

suitable for schoolchildren to consume: the group (as oral historians) construct partial and mediated representations of the past (through their voices).

The group's recollections of how history had been taught to them at school, is a further 'text' which has contributed to mediating the group's ethnographies. The women spoke about history at school being 'drummed' in to them and 'talked' at them, and the content of which consisting of 'great figures and events'. Clearly, the school history as 'text' has mediated their accounts of the past. Furthermore, as noted earlier the actual structuring of the workshops *was* in terms of 'events' where the women, whilst attempting to write 'grassroots' history, clearly had led extra-ordinary lives: their stories had 'deploy[ed] recognised cultural conventions' (Finnegan, 1997). The museum itself also played an important role in mediating these workshops in terms of instructing and informing the women about the medium to use to convey their message to draw the children into the workshops. This essentially involved creating a sense of fear, excitement and humour to involve the children (these strategies are explored in detail in Chapters 5 and 6). Through the college, the museum and by their own positioning of educational establishments, it has been seen how the group's attempts to tell plausible stories about times past have been mediated from 'without'.

The printing demonstrator at the Museum of Liverpool Life, the group of women from the adult education college and the demonstrators and guides at Quarry Bank Mill are all oral historians, but this is much more 'formal' or public because it is performed collectively for an audience. Such performances are mediated

because in most cases the participants will not be professionally trained actors, accustomed to public speaking and will have been given some guidance. Hence, various strategies were employed to prepare them for this 'role'. For example, the adult education group were told that they had to get the children involved in the workshops:

> '... we all stood up and started talking to these kids ... and the poor children were bored to tears ... one of the women from the drama er part of the education committee came along and ... she said you know you can't go on like that ... you know you've got to get children involved and we learned from that rather than simply talk at them and have them bored rigid' (Adult education group member).

The printing demonstrator overcome the initial difficulties of his occupational transition and the need to acquire new skills through, amongst other things, attending public speaking courses:

> 'Erm I've been on a couple of courses for erm, actual public speaking and that so I found that helps so, I, through the museum like sort of on-the-job training, but very basically at the beginning we were breaking ground that nobody had broken in this country. There wasn't even a book to pick up and read on it' (Printing demonstrator).

The research identified the adult education group participants justifying their oral histories by stressing that they did conduct research on areas where they had limited knowledge; hence conditioning also comes from *within*. There is recognition of the limitations of their own text-producing capabilities:

> 'I hope you haven't got the impression that we don't do any research. We do ['yes'] ... we do quite a bit ... don't we?'
> 'But not too many facts and figures.'
> 'Well what we do tell the children is factual... we all remember different things and the hardest thing I think we ever had to do was the pawn shop.'
> 'Whereby everyone had some kind of idea or remembered the pawn shop ... what it meant...'
> 'You couldn't get the information..'
> '...you couldn't get the actual er... how the pawn shop works...what the poundage was and how you know it was ...all got books out, very limited information even in books...' (Adult education group members).

The printer also stressed that he did research and that he wanted visitors to believe what he told them (when he moved out of his 1930s 'caricature'):

> 'But when I'm actually giving them *facts* then, *no* I *do* want them to believe me because if it's facts then it's *true* and it's something I've researched and I know is true no matter how strange it seems like ...' (Printing demonstrator, his emphasis).

By widening and verifying their knowledge, these examples have shown oral historians employing 'expert' tactics (doing research). Yet, it became apparent that on some occasions the oral historians had to rely on the experts. When producing the printing display, the demonstrator acknowledged the limitations of his own experiences, turning to the curators for advice.

Clearly, for the adult education group, the printing demonstrator and also the guides at QBM the more *professional* they become in their performance, through the influence of the museum professionals, one can argue that they become less authentic. They are told how to 'story' themselves, how to speak in public, how to draw children and visitors into their performances: their 'true' selves are being displaced, and a 'public' face being created. The process of creative retrospection and the existence of cultural conventions highlight the selectivity of oral accounts of times past. These representations are the result of a plurality of 'texts' which have been mediated and conditioned.

In this part of the chapter I have shown how the 'truth' whilst seemingly coming from the 'intended' meanings in personal narratives ('first hand views') of those who have been there then and who are here now, is inherently constructed, either externally (through the advice of museum professionals) or from within (from

Finnegan's (1997) cultural conventions). This section has also started to consider how 'oral histories' as representations of the past may be received by visitors to heritage attractions, in particular, highlighting the 'pleasures of consumption' thesis (Mackay, 1997).

4.4 Gateways to the past III: expert history

The chapter turns to examine the notion of 'expert' as a doorway to the past, where truth resides. Who is an 'expert'? As society's interest in the past, and local history in particular, persists, attention is continually drawn to the 'traditional' expert's voice, as television programmes such as 'The Antiques Roadshow' and 'Going for a Song' bear testimony (cf. Fyfe and Ross, 1996): here, art historians, museum professionals, antique dealers are positioned as the specialists - having in-depth, specific, detailed knowledge about times (and artefacts from the) past. They are able to story the past for public consumption.

At MLL, regular surgeries were held which gave visitors an opportunity to meet the curators and bring along objects which they wished to find out more information. The surgeries are a clear indication of the 'expert' role of a curator. The surgeries place the curator as the source of the 'truth' as they are able to verify or authenticate the artefacts, and weave a story around them: construct knowledge about the object. Experts story the objects, the place, and therefore the past. Through their skill and scholarly endeavours truth appears to be written into the artefacts. Experts are positioned as 'knowing' or being able to find out about the object (looking for clues to detect and connect with the truth for the

visitor, through searching for markers which give the object meaning and validity). Here, the 'curators as experts' concept confers to the 'mass culture' thesis, where visitors are deemed to succumb to curatorial knowledge about both times past and about artefacts from those times. Curators and other museum professionals have claimed their position as 'experts' via learned processes in specific period or artefact specialisms. Often educated beyond degree level, becoming an 'expert' in this *professional* sense, takes time to acquire the necessary skills and depth of knowledge to enable a person to become an 'authority' and be in a position to produce representations of the past for public consumption.

And yet, there have been spectacular public challenges to curatorial displays and exhibitions (Jackson, 1991; Zolberg, 1996), as the 'politics of representation' has challenged the position of curators to represent others. The knowledge of direct experience, empathy and understanding are deemed to be superficially evident in such displays: any real depth of understanding being absent. Furthermore, this undermining of the curatorial role of 'experts' allows opportunities for a greater consideration of others who perhaps, could equally claim the position or authority of 'expert'. Such a questioning has recently been undertaken by Urry (1996) who has turned his attention to consider who else, may, through their enthusiasms and endeavours, be equally deemed 'experts'? Urry maintains that little is known about 'how people's popular memories, of a place, industry, or social institution, are stimulated, enthused, and then organised into a potential documentation of remembrance' (1996: 53). Here, Urry is asking how people, through their

'collective enthusiasms' (Hoggett and Bishop, 1986, cited in Urry, 1996) are responsible for constructing their own representations of times past? To this end, Urry notes:

> '... there is a great deal of 'work' involved although it is normally done in people's 'leisure' time; the members work for each other through a complex system of mutual aid; they are self-organised and are particularly resentful of outside experts instructing them how to act; they produce a large array of outputs many of which are consumed by the membership itself; their activity is not passive and individualistic but involves communication and emotional satisfaction; there is strong resistance to commodification; and much emphasis is placed upon acquiring arcane forms of knowledge and skill' (1996: 59).

Outlining such practices, it is clear that people (without the formal 'trappings' of curatorial status, skill and knowledge) can still become active and hold claim to being an 'expert' in a particular time, place or other specialism. Their 'collective enthusiasms' are thus seen as a mobilising and empowering force, existing *outside* the museum circuit, and in fact, could be in opposition to this circuit. Samuel (1994:27) has noted contemporary enthusiasms for finding out about the past:

> 'One of the more remarkable additions to the ranks of Britain's memory-keepers - or notable recent augmentation of them - would be the multiplication of do-it-yourself curators and mini-museums ... Then reference would need to be made to the legions of bargain-hunters who through the medium of the flea market and the car-boot sale have created whole new classes of collectibles, or made archives of the future out of the ephemera of the everyday.'

A recent, if larger scale example of this has emerged from Sharon Macdonald's (1997) study of the role of heritage in identity formation. Macdonald examined the preservation of Gaelic culture through the development of the Aros heritage centre on the Isle of Skye. She discovered that 'cultural tourism' was embraced on the island for two key reasons: its economic benefits and also more importantly for its ability to advance and strengthen 'Gaelic revivalism' for the island's younger, professional social groupings. Macdonald (1997) noted that those responsible for setting up the Aros heritage centre had gained inspiration and

guidance from looking at how the 'heritage model' (i.e. that *every* place has a 'story') could be utilised to provide both a source of employment (tourism preventing the out-migration of younger generations) and a focal point for the people of Skye to protect or harness their Gaelic roots and identity.

Macdonald's study, then, illustrates how Urry's examination of such 'enthusiasms' has turned the notion of 'expert' on its head. Clearly, it now seems inappropriate to ascribe the 'expert' label only to the 'traditional' curators or museum professionals, as the examples briefly illustrated above have demonstrated how 'expertise' (and enthusiasm) can come from many sources, including, those with a profound sense of identity, or those simply with curiosity (cf. Samuel, 1994 on the 'memory-keepers'). This example shows how people can come together via their 'enthusiasms' and construct representations of the past, adhering to the heritage model, on a scale comparable to professional ('expert') curatorial endeavours. Samuel's (1994) attention to the do-it-yourself collector ('memory keepers') and the rise of the mini-museum suggests that the 'expert' label is also applicable here. Through individual's (or group's) enthusiasms they gradually acquire both knowledge and artefacts: in the process they too become 'experts' in their chosen specialism.

In this study, whilst I have already discussed the women's history group in the previous section in terms of them being oral historians, in discussing the malleability of the 'expert' role, here too, the group's activities are worth returning to. The group initially came together through attending a local college,

and in choosing to study local history courses, their interest in local history began to grow. These two 'forces' pushed the group together and towards the direction of writing and performing history workshops for school visits. The group remain oral historians - their collective memories are the founding source for the workshops, however, in the light of Urry's (1996) questioning of the 'expert', this group are also 'experts': their 'collective enthusiasms' about Liverpool history have continued to be sustained long after their formal ties to the college have been cut. The group remain interested in and committed to finding out more about Liverpool's history (going beyond their memories) and searching for more details and evidence. Furthermore, whilst the group do make appropriate use in the workshops of some artefacts from MLL collections, many objects used are ones which are the personal property of group members: they are utilising their own 'archives'. So for these reasons too, in opening up the notion of 'expert' to wider scrutiny and analysis, it can be seen that far from being just the conventional curatorial 'expert', there remains a plethora of 'experts' involved in producing (or in having the ability to produce) representations of the past. Similarly at QBM, many of those who work at the site do so on a voluntary basis and they are encouraged by the curatorial team to develop their knowledge about the site.

Acknowledging the plurality of 'experts' involved in the construction of representations of times past, the 'mass culture' thesis clearly becomes destabilised as it is evident that individuals (through their collective enthusiasms, yet without the 'curator' label) are able to acquire skill and knowledge about

peoples, artefacts, places or specialisms, and in doing so elevate themselves above and away from being categorised as succumbing to curatorial endeavours.

4.5 Summary

In this chapter I have taken Hall's (1997) three theories of representation and critically evaluated them in relation to the notion that museums are 'sites of representation' (Barnes and Duncan, 1993), through the suggestion that within such sites there are three key bases to authenticity where truth resides: in stones, voices and experts. Evaluating the first two 'bases' (stones and voices), the reflective and intentional schools of thought cannot be justified as dominant theories of representation because I highlighted the need for interpretation and demonstrated the presence of mediation and conditioning within these two 'bases': clearly, they adhere to the 'constructionist' view of representation (Hall, 1997).

In examining 'truth' from experts it was necessary to problematise the notion of 'experts' as simply curatorial or museum professionals. The work of Urry (1996), Macdonald (1997) and Samuel (1994) illustrated how individuals come together and through their 'collective enthusiasms' (Hoggett and Bishop, 1986) acquire skills and knowledge to become equally worthy of the 'expert' tag. It is in the *process* of becoming an expert, in the acquisition of knowledge, skills and specialities where individuals draw upon a plethora of sources of information to build up a knowledge base from which their representations of the past can be produced. In this sense, the experts too, follow the constructionist perspective.

Chapter 5: Constructing plausible stories

'In the public view, plausibility is as good as truth, and historians are worthy of their heritage hire' (Lowenthal, 1997: 167).

'I think it gets back to, to one either tries to give a correct impressionistic view or otherwise to be much more rigorous and try to sort of replicate, reconstruct. I think we always try to have a reference, we always use a reference, we don't try to make things up ... we always have to tie it back to evidence' (Curator, MLL).

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter identified museums as sites of representation where 'truth' could be found in either stones, voices or from the experts. The main outcome for that chapter was the notion that museum representations were partial, mediated and ultimately constructions. As such, in this chapter, the focus is on lending empirical weight to some of the key themes identified and discussed in Chapter 4 but more importantly attention turns to developing the notion of museum representations as constructing plausibility. Plausibility is deemed the root of producing convincing representations of times past, following the previous chapter's suggestion that the sources of 'truth' are mediated and contested. Drawing upon evidence gained from qualitative field research at the Albert Dock, I investigate how two museum exhibitions namely the school workshops and the printer's workshop display, are texts constructed to convey plausible representations of the past. Returning to the notion of museums as both sites where truth resides and spaces of contestation, the chapter explores the (in)authenticity of both the museum displays and the performances within them. The performative strategies employed to produce these texts are considered (cf. Crang, 1997). In particular, notions of 'storying the self' (Finnegan, 1997),

containment and 'face-work' (cf. Smith, 1988) are addressed. The (in)authenticity of these performances and displays is examined in terms of museums as places of truth and as spaces of contestation.

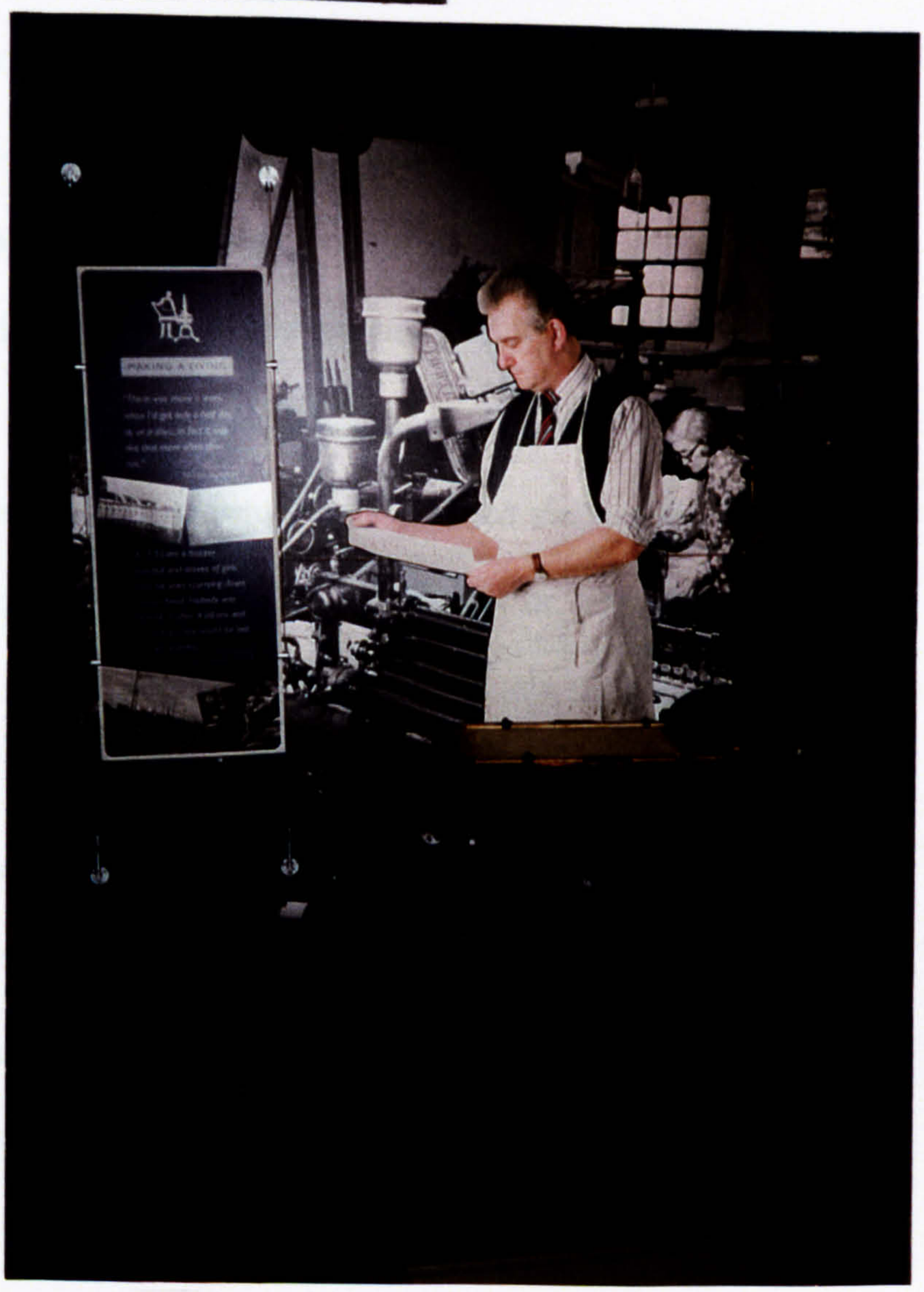
5.2 Two 'texts': the print shop experience and school workshops

i. The print shop experience, Museum of Liverpool Life

> 'See the traditional methods of printing brought alive with demonstrations in the reconstructed print shop' (Museum of Liverpool Life, promotional leaflet, c. 1994).

The printer's workshop display is an interactive exhibition which represents some aspects of the printing industry in the 1930s (see Photographs 5.1 and 5.2). It is located in the 'Making A Living' gallery of the Museum of Liverpool Life. A variety of museum presentation and exhibition techniques is employed in this display. A resident craft demonstrator allows the visitors to have a go at operating a small Albion Printing Press where they produce a souvenir certificate as a reward for their efforts. The visitors are able to converse with the craft demonstrator about printing. A plinth at the foot of the display area briefly explains the development of printing whilst, suspended overhead, an audio-visual video display recounts, in more detail, the printing process and the changes which have occurred within the printing industry via a commentary provided by contemporary printers. The video display can be operated by visitors when the demonstrator is not in the workshop. On this occasion, the printing area is cordoned off to prevent visitors entering the workshop area and so only the video

Photograph 5.1:
The printing workshop display, Museum of Liverpool Life



Photograph 5.2:
The Albion Printing Press, Museum of Liverpool Life

and plinth are available to inform visitors about the printing industry; they can do no more than gaze on the 'resting' workshop. Usually, a sign is placed on the workbench with messages such as 'on annual leave' or 'gone for lunch' to explain the printer's absence; they provide a personal touch and suggest that the workshop is only temporarily unoccupied and that it is a 'working' environment rather than a dormant exhibit.

The promotional literature portrays the printing display as inviting visitors to consume a variety of both passive and (inter)active heritage experiences. On the one hand, there is the invitation to visitors to come and gaze upon the spectacle of past printing practices coming 'alive' before their eyes; on the other, the demonstrations suggest an element of active participation required from the visitors. We are informed that the print shop has been 'reconstructed', which implies that objects have been brought together again. Clearly, a visual and active heritage experience is suggested in the promotional literature as visitors become immersed in the printing methods of bygone times. Moreover, the printing workshop display suggests opportunities for varied visitor experiences: responding to 'expert' endeavours; tapping into oral history or, connecting with 'artefacts'.

ii. School children's workshops, Albert Dock

Having been made aware of the adult education group's previous oral history activities (documented in Chapter 4), the Education Officer at NMGM approached the group to see if they would be willing to 'put something on' at the

Albert Dock. At the time of the group discussion (August, 1995), two major workshops had been produced -- 'Children of the 30s' and 'VE Day' -- and performed to school groups in the Education Centre in the basement of the Merseyside Maritime Museum, several times over a 2-3 year period (they have since continued to be performed in the MLL). The workshops were based on particular themes namely 'a 1930s childhood' and 'life during the war'. The group chose objects and events from which short 'scenes' could be produced and performed within the museum environment; the audience being guided through each of the scenes by a narrator. For the 'Children of the Thirties' workshop, the group wrote scenes on: 'bath night', 'the rag rug', 'the corner shop' and 'wash day'; whilst the VE Day workshop was centred around 'rationing', 'homelife', 'an air raid and the aftermath of a bombing' and finished with 'the end of the war celebrations'. Each of the scenes played out in the workshops had 'backdrops' of for example, a shop, kitchen or a front room. The scenes were complemented by the inclusion of artefacts borrowed from the Museum of Liverpool Life. Here, school children (as visitors) are directed to oral history as a source of truth, where lived experiences 'story' the objects and artefacts used in the workshops.

5.3 Authenticity, 'truth' and plausible stories

In Chapter 4, the question posed was: where, in museums (as sites of representation) does truth reside? From the three possibilities that I outlined (truth in touching stones, listening to voices or through 'expert' skill and knowledge), I concluded that all three bases to authenticity had, in various ways, been mediated and constructed. In this chapter I turn to consider authenticity and truth in the

production of convincing stories of times past. I examine in more detail how these bases to authenticity converge to produce a 'constructed' and mediated museum text. In particular, I explore how such 'texts' are constructed and then *re*produced (through performance) for public consumption.

I asked one of the curators at the Museum of Liverpool Life, whether they thought 'authenticity' was important in museum exhibitions:

> 'I think authenticity is important in that I would not want to see an exhibition, I'll give you an example one of my early years in Liverpool. I saw an exhibition which had been done by amateur group, and it had been done about Liverpool life. I looked at that and said that's not Liverpool, that's Stoke-on-Trent to me, billowing smoke, and he sort of went ... you know (shrug), you know, (laughter) and it's rather like what film people do, do it all the time, and if you are in the know, you know the shots are not correct, they are inaccurate and I would never condone that sort of inaccuracy and I would also what we should do [use?] real authentic objects rather than replicas wherever we can and but we have to accept that certain things that we want to represent, display to public will not have survived and therefore it is appropriate to use replicas...when you're talking about working class history, things were used until they either wore out or fell apart ... apart from the fact that they hadn't been collected in museums, if they had survived at all, to be collected so in certain instances and some curators will argue that's a reason for not dealing with that type of history because you haven't got material evidence therefore don't bother yourself with it...' (Curator, MLL).

The curator equates being authentic to being 'accurate' and giving visitors accurate reflections of the past (suggestion of 'mimesis'?). Whilst having 'actual' objects from the time being represented is preferable, it is almost a 'secondary' issue (or not necessarily needed) as the museum's focus on working class social history suggests that it is both expected and accepted that the existence of authentic 'real' artefacts will be rare, as they were usually used until exhausted (and therefore not available for collection) or were seen as not worthy of collecting. To this end, the museum curator clearly feels that they can still provide an authentic representation, based on replicas: as long as the story is accurate. The MLL curator concedes that using replicas in a museum which focuses on

working class history is both necessary and acceptable within the museum profession. Moreover, the curator maintains that in-museum research conducted in the planning stages of a new exhibition had revealed that visitors do not necessarily mind if the artefacts are not the originals:

> '...Erm but the other things is sometimes you can use supplement and enhance the experience of the visitor, again going back to the focus groups for the King's regiment, some of the things that was coming out from the family members there who were being asked about how they felt standing visits with their children and they said oh we'd like something the children can touch to and er, smell - they want an experience, we don't mind if what you give them to handle is not the original as long as it is representative of that original. They will learn through that experience of touching and enjoy it as well' (Curator, MLL).

This curatorial response is verified further from the qualitative interviews conducted at MLL. Visitors did not seem to mind if replicas had been used in the representations, as long as the story told (woven around them) was true. However, they did acknowledge the difference made to their visit if they knew or were told that an object they had seen or touched was the genuine artefact. It was suggested that at least with replicas because they were 'fake' (and therefore worthless) the curators gave visitors an opportunity to touch and handle them which did add to their experience:

> 'Replicas, I mean nowadays they are really good - you can't tell the difference ... You wouldn't notice, not with today's standards' (Danielle, 19) 'No I think if it's displayed and exhibited in the correct way, there's no problem whatsoever ...' (Steve, 35) 'No, it doesn't have to be genuine, in the slightest... If it's well made, and believable, fine' (James, 65) 'I can't see - as long as the information is there ... nothing wrong with replicas.' (Brian, 50s) ' ... it is better to have a replica than nothing at all.' (Ann, 50s) 'I think replicas are just as good. It wouldn't have to be the real thing for me. No... If you are trying to get something that's extremely rare, you might not get it ... and not display it at all. I'd rather have a replica than nothing at all... I'd rather see something visual, than just written down, if you know what I mean.' (Stephen, 31)

Another curator, returns to the argument that museums are places of 'truth':

> 'I think we would like to think that what separates us from [unclear] is that we have scholarly rigour, normally like to think truth [comes] from us ...' (Curator, MLL).

To this end, it is as though the curator believes that there is a general consensus ('knowing'?) amongst museum visitors that these sites represent the truth, they tell accurate and authentic stories, which may be woven around replicas. However, in contrast, it is suggested that for some museum professionals a 'lack of material evidence' (i.e. genuine artefacts) is a sufficient argument for not telling (or representing) that story. If such an argument is contextualised through the 'heritage spectrum' it becomes necessary to consider what type of museums will only the genuine, authentic artefacts be good enough to display (art history, perhaps?). Where do these places fit on the spectrum? And does it matter to the public? The aura of rarity and authenticity (of an 'original' painting, for example), being displayed behind a glass cabinet amid tight security: the 'truth' is there in its authenticity. Would an exact copy (a print of the painting) engage the public any less?

Distinctions were also expressed by visitors as to whom it was deemed appropriate for replicas to be used, for instance, one visitor in particular suggested that it was not necessary for school children to have the genuine artefacts. For example:

> 'Erm as regards children, I don't think it matters unless, there is something there that is exactly the same as the original, authentic ...[DB: '... but for adults?'] ... perhaps for adults, yes you need the real thing - they are more interested in the real thing ...' (John, 50s)

For this visitor, showing children replicas and giving them the opportunity to touch or handle them was seen as sufficient, along with being told the object's function or story. However, this visitor also argued that for adults, the genuine

artefact was more appropriate than any replicas. For this visitor then, 'reception' seems guided by understanding the notion of authenticity: adults (as a singular category) preferring and requiring the real and genuine. Moreover, by arguing that replicas are adequate for children, this visitor is positioning children as potential 'victims' of the cultural industries. In this way, children are cast as being too young to understand the concept of 'authenticity' and are therefore at the mercy of curatorial decisions and practices (i.e. obtaining 'truth' from experts). However, I am not so sure that such a distinction offered by this visitor is sustainable. For instance, another visitor, whilst accepting the need for replicas (and being satisfied with them) acknowledges the connection ('truth' in stones) that can be made from the present back to the past through the use of genuine, authentic artefacts:

> 'Well I think it is great if you can have the genuine one because you can stare at it and say look at that, that belonged to someone. I mean I think it's quite fascinating if you're by something, what I mean is standing by something in the museum and you go that's a thousand years old, and you count back a thousand years and you think that actually belonged to somebody or they actually held it in their hands. Well I find that fascinating. But if it's a replica you know, if they can't have the actual original, sometimes it's not possible but it's good if they do. I think that's great. [DB: 'But it wouldn't take anything away?'] 'No, as long as, I'd still enjoy looking at it. It's just when you look at an original, if say that cup was a thousand years old, somebody a thousand years ago actually held that, I mean that's quite remarkable that it is still there and you think of all the things that have gone on in a thousand years, you know, you are talking about like William the Conqueror, then and a thousand years ago is like a million miles away isn't it really ... it's wonderful and you can picture it back in your mind can't you? I think that's really good.' (Joan, 60s)

Joan is comfortable with the use of replicas: she accepts that in some instances they may be the only source of representation. However, Joan also acknowledges the difference made (to her visit and her reactions to exhibits) when she knows a particular object is the real, genuine one. For Joan, its authenticity is her link to the past. Moreover, I am convinced that Joan (a regular visitor to MLL, and who

was visiting the museum with her husband and grandchildren when I interviewed her) would have little difficulty conveying to her grandchildren the notion of authenticity.

Furthermore, truth and authenticity relate to more than just artefacts: the stories woven around such objects also have to be true. For the school workshops the adult education group stressed the authenticity of their stories, in terms of recounting 'facts' that happened in the past which were real:

> *'We did try to keep erm the things we talked about authentic ['they were fact weren't they?']* when, when we like for instance said about 5 of the boys being killed and the mother and father. The mother and father were on the ground level and the five little boys they were the whole family were in the basement... and the five little boys ... that which was supposed to be safe, and the five little boys were killed, and the father and mother weren't and that was true and also erm, what was the name of the road where the school was?' ['Ermine Road School'] ...where there were about a hundred, I forget the number, but something like a hundred, were killed ... and they couldn't get the bodies out and they are buried there and that was fact as well and I think *when you are talking real facts like it's not fiction, it's real fact, it happened here, then it is emotional and I'm sure the truth of it came through to the children because we all felt emotional when we said it ['yes'] didn't we?'* (Adult education group member, my emphasis).

The group were convinced that this veracity came across to the children.

Clearly, notions of authenticity and truth are complicated. Authenticity is shaped, in part, by the nature of the museum (its 'place' on the heritage spectrum and its subject matter) regarding the availability of genuine artefacts. In the main, visitors were satisfied with the use of replicas in museums, even though many did acknowledge the difference that having the 'actual' one would make to their visit. However, the overriding common thread is the story told about the object (whether genuine or fake): this must be true.

5.4 Producing plausible stories

The arguments raised in the previous section concerning (in)authenticity, plausibility and representation need to be addressed in relation to empirical evidence. To this end, I examine the two museum displays (outlined in section 5.2) as 'texts' and consider how they have been produced, exploring the (in)authenticity of these representations of the past.

Following inter-departmental shifts in curatorial responsibility Printing History was transferred from National Museum and Galleries on Merseyside's Decorative Art Department to the Regional History Department. The appointment of a former printer to 'sort out' the uncurated printing collection was the first stage in the process of constructing the printing workshop display:

> 'the contract was three months and it was to quote sort out unquote the printing collection which had remained erm collected but *dormant* for 12 years so there was a lot of sorting to do ...' (Printing demonstrator, his emphasis).

Therefore, an agenda was set to find some coherence and meaning within the resting printing collection. The museum professionals brought in a person who had direct experience and knowledge of the printing industry, and the ability to order the collection and provide a structured interpretation. Therefore, in this context, the ex-printer was employed to produce a 'text' for the public to 'read'. In this section then, the role of the ex-printer as demonstrator and 'author' of this museum text is examined. Producing a museum exhibition mirrors the ethnographic project of 'writing culture' (Clifford and Marcus, 1988). The active process of writing (producing) 'true fictions' (Geertz, 1973) involves sorting, constructing and interpreting fieldnotes to provide a textual account of, for

example, a social group. The same actions of sorting, constructing and interpreting occur in the production of museum displays. Clearly, the museum had to make sense of the 'uncurated' collection before it could be put on public display.

The printing collection required 'sorting out' because the curators had decided to open up this store to the public, as part of the Large Objects Collection. The two acts, of 'sorting out' and of 'opening up' the store signify an active process of construction and where the museum was clearly in control. Firstly, when one considers that the museum decided to open up their stores to the public gaze, it was their choice, their decision to allow the public into such traditionally forbidden territory:

> 'Museum stores as a general rule are *not* open to the public erm except maybe once a year' (Printing demonstrator, his emphasis);

> '... in 1986 ... the [Large Objects Collection] opened in Prince's Dock and there was at that time, the printing history collection was one of the collections which was on open storage displays, so you would walk into this place, display and see all this Physical Science and Decorative Art stuff ...' (Curator, MLL).

The store was opened up to the public only when a great deal of sorting out had taken place. The public were not being given the opportunity to see the stores 'warts and all' as they exist and are used in everyday life by museum workers and curatorial staff. Only when they had been polished and organised into something 'meaningful', that could be experienced by the visitors, were the stores opened. Here, the museum's 'honesty' in revealing its hidden depths exemplifies Goffman's (1959) front and back regions and the concept of staged authenticity (MacCannell, 1973). The 'stores' can be perceived as a 'back' region which have

been made by the curators into a 'front' region, but which signify to visitors as being 'back' regions. The authenticity of the setting has been conditioned, as the stores have been made over into an environment suitable for the public to encounter. In addition, the issue of front and back regions and delving into the hidden/forbidden depths of museum collections connects to the wide-ranging debates concerning the experiencing of museums and heritage attractions. The decision to allow people into the 'back' regions is potentially open to two key interpretations. First, that it is another form of manipulation by those working in the (mass) culture industries (in terms of selectivity and control) or second, that it can be used in an educating and empowering manner for visitors to see (some of) what the curators 'do'; become more aware of the limitations of curating and acquire a greater understanding of how exhibitions are put together (constructed) - the process behind the representations. This is highlighted even more recently in Liverpool, as 'back regions' remain popular spaces for the public gaze; the recently opened National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside's Conservation Centre (this is not on the Albert Dock site) exemplifies this 'de rigeur' in heritage presentation, where the 'messiness' is opened up and laid bare:

> 'see a demonstration or watch a live video link up that will show work going on behind-the-scenes with conservators specialising in different objects and materials' (Conservation Centre, Spring Events, 1997).

One can argue that the opening up of the back regions challenges the model of constructing plausibility (making constructions/representations convincing) when the mechanisms (revealing what curators 'do') are brought under the public gaze. Revealing the processes behind the representations for public scrutiny allows

visitors to see just how the 'text' is written, yet, one could again ask, whether this 'revelation' is no more than just another 'text' to be consumed?

Moreover, recognising the rarity of the museum stores being opened up to the public, one can ask why did this strategy surface at Liverpool? The museum worker informs us that at the time it was quite a novel and pioneering strategy in terms of museum 'exhibiting'. The museum worker argues that the printing collection successfully opened on Sunday afternoons:

> '... instead of just opening it for one day [a year] they opened erm ... Sunday afternoons for 13 Sunday afternoons and I it was an absolute raging success the thing generated erm ... *13000* people in about, I can't remember, it was 10 or 12 er Sunday afternoons erm, then this idea of an *interactive* display erm which had been tried very successfully in America and they decided to do it over here...' (Printing demonstrator, his emphasis).

Allowing the public into the museum's back regions, as a pioneering strategy, echoes the concepts of inter-urban competition and serial reproduction (Harvey, 1989) where similar cultural tourism developments arise to aid the economic regeneration of a locality. Replication also surfaces *within* such cultural tourist sites, where methods of representation and experiences offered for consumption are also copied, a kind of 'inter-*museum* competition' can be said to exist. Such 'competition' was touched on in Chapter 4 where Sharon Macdonald (1997) suggested that those responsible for producing the Aros heritage centre on the Isle of Skye had looked to other heritage centres for inspiration and guidance on how to design and structure their heritage attraction, eventually settling on the 'Story of ...' heritage model. Macdonald (1997) highlights repetition of representation styles and approaches within the heritage tourism sector.

The resident craft (printing) demonstrator moved to MLL and was given the task of:

> '... basically turn[ing] it from an empty [gallery] space into a printer's workshop ... the design of the place, what went into it was left to me. I was given an empty space, I was then given a series of *dates* [from the curators] that I could work to, sort of 1850s ... er ... 1930s ... 1950s' (Printing demonstrator, his emphasis).

The empty gallery space was eventually turned into the reconstructed print shop (outlined earlier), set around the 1930s. Reflecting on the 'themes' displayed in phase one of the MLL, and the museum's aim ('...the museum will tell the story of Liverpool and its people and their contribution to national life' (Promotional literature, c.1994)), the printing industry exhibition seemed almost out of place. This reaction was born out of the demonstrator's admission that the printing workshop was not 'place specific' and that printing (during the 1930s) was quite an elite profession. To this end, why depict, in such an interactive way, an industry which would only have direct 'relevance' to a narrow band of Liverpool people? Why, for example, had the docker's life, not been represented in an equally interactive method, possibly being more 'popular' and relevant to Liverpudlians? In reply to these questions, the curator maintained that printing was chosen for purely pragmatic reasons:

> '...It's, it just boils down to practicalities I'm afraid, in that, the way in which the demonstrating team was set up at the Maritime Museum, was at, in the 1980s, was craft based, so they had a printer, they had a ship model, ship bottler, they had a cooper. They essentially got people who had been involved in the trade, skilled trades of the dockland area and to demonstrate those skills to the public, skills that were dying out. So it's purely practicalities that he was there in the job, permanent basis and had the skill, had been popular at the Large Object Collection...' (Curator, MLL).

Clearly, in thinking about how the people of Liverpool, as visitors to the MLL, could experience the printing display, given the lack of place specificity for the subject matter, opportunities for the 'pleasures of consumption' theory will

potentially be more limited as there will be fewer people with knowledge of printing history visiting the museum, instead, visitors would have to rely on curatorial efforts at representing the printing trade, and as such, the 'mass culture' thesis is clearly dominant. If a docker's life had been chosen to be represented in an interactionist capacity being both more popular and relevant to the people of Liverpool then opportunities for responding to the representation in a 'pleasures' way (through oral history) would potentially be more prevalent. Here, the curators would have tapped into local people's sense of place (being geared more to the docks than printing) than just making convenient use of the collected printing artefacts. The actual subject matter, the 'text' written by the curators is fundamentally influenced by more practical issues such as the existing structure and ethos behind the demonstrating team at the Maritime Museum.

The curator stressed both the relevance of the printing trade to Liverpool, in terms of justifying its representation in the museum, and also the importance of the whole of the Printing History collection held in store:

> 'Erm, but I mean I would, it was important that printing did be presented because printing was an important industry in Liverpool and it was something, I mean Liverpool's the centre of Welsh language printing, for example. There was a lot Jewish, of printing in the Jewish, er Jewish community and you know, the Post and Echo, very early regional newspaper shown. An important industry which needed to be represented, it, it has been represented in a rather cameo fashion, I agree with you ... So it's a large and important collection and I did actually had it surveyed by a [curator] who used to be responsible for the printing collection at the Science Museum ...' (Curator, MLL).

Another curator spoke of the printing trade as being quite a common feature for museums and that the Printing History collection had emerged out of individual curatorial interest. Here, one is reminded that with long-established museums, curatorial 'legacies' are often in operation. Collections formed out of curatorial

interest subsequently, in time, get passed on to other curators who may not possess the same interests but are still required to continue to make some sense out of them for public interest and display. Moreover, the curator accepted the limitations of curatorial 'skill' and imagination:

> 'Quite a number of open air museums that have a printer, whereas it is quite hard to imagine what a docker would have done ... erm... and the printing collection was, I understand, partly built up as a result of [prior curatorial] interest ... representing industry which we now, difficult collection to make sense of...' (Curator, MLL).

The practicalities of museum environments clearly surface, where space requirements mean that only a fraction of the 'stored' printing collection can come before the public gaze, in a 'cameo' fashion. Urry (1990) following MacCannell (1976) argues that interest in seeing other people's work has gained popularity as a tourist opportunity. Here, my initial reaction to the printing industry as lacking relevance to Liverpool people, does not sit very well alongside MacCannell's (1976) 'alienated leisure' thesis:

> '...but erm it's quite nice to actually get people thinking ... erm to tell them bits about printing because printing was always *a closed shop* and I *don't* necessarily mean like in the way that erm it was *unionised,* I mean that it was more like a secret society *what* happened in printing was *known only to printers.* It was never known by the general public. The *general* public have learned more about printing in the last 20 years than in the last... 500 years [DB: 'Mmmm.'] ... because it's, it's opened up, because printing as I as I knew it as I started is, is basically gone [now] it's a computer science and it's only now that people are beginning to talk about what printing used to be like' (Printing demonstrator, his emphasis).

As a 'closed shop' then, printing as both a process and industry was deemed known to only printers. As such, in considering how the general public may therefore view representations of printing history, one could suggest the 'closed shop' ethos would have influenced its reception by limiting the amount of information already known by potential visitors, suggesting that they would be looking to curators to provide that source of information.

In one sense, the process of designing and constructing the printing display at MLL was very straightforward; according to the demonstrator:

> 'I worked out how much space I had, each piece was going to take up and just jiggled about with it and got a plan to scale and cut pieces of cardboard out to scale and I just moved them around until I was happy or whatever... and I did, and just told them exactly what I wanted and put it in myself' (Printing demonstrator).

Yet, in another sense, the transformation from an empty gallery space to the printing display was far from simple, particularly when one examines more than just *what* the demonstrator (and curatorial staff) wanted putting in the display, but also investigates *why* such objects were chosen. This can be exemplified by looking at the Albion Printing Press, the centrepiece of the printing display.

The printing press is perhaps the most significant feature of the display. The visitors to this display are able to operate the press when the printer is in residence: they are offered an *interactive* experience. From the fieldwork observations the response to such interaction has been very positive; the visitors enjoy having an opportunity to use the printing machine and generally seem pleased with their souvenir certificate (perhaps further evidence to support MacCannell's (1976) 'alienated leisure' thesis?). The printing press, however, dates from the eighteen-hundreds whilst the period setting of the print shop is the 1930s and so issues of authenticity, plausibility and the 'truth' surface here. The demonstrator explains why this representational inaccuracy exists:

> 'we *chose* the machine we, we have on display because it's an *interactive* display and it's *safe* to use. No other criteria other than it is safe to use. We *know* it's way out of date for the date we are actually supposed to be setting erm ... but safety overrides that criteria... the date, so we have an eighteen-hundred machine...' (Printing demonstrator, his emphasis).

The demonstrator and curators are aware that the printing press is not truly representative of the time intended to be portrayed:

> 'We *know* that it is totally out of date machine, *way* out of date, in fact small, small firms erm, had machines that were running off electric motors with erm, erm ... compressed air suckers to lift the paper up to feed them to mechanical grippers for printing by 1905, 1904, 1905 erm, so that machine is *hopelessly* out of date and really does, says nothing about printing in the 1930s. It's, it's a museum *gallery* and as such all you can do, in that space anyway, is *show* a little bit of what it would have been like, hopefully we can get a little bit of working practice over from my personal knowledge, but apart from that no, I honestly think it looks nothing like a printer's [premises]' (Printing demonstrator, his emphasis).

The attention to historical accuracy or period authenticity are of secondary importance when the issue of safety is acknowledged. The demonstrator reflects on the printing press being unable to offer any meaningful comment ('says nothing') on printing during the 1930s, echoing to an extent the curator's remark that the printing industry had been portrayed in a 'cameo' fashion. The limitations of the printing exhibition are compensated through the demonstrator's oral/expert knowledge about 'working practices' and plausible stories woven around the objects and told to visitors. A more 'up-to-date' printing machine may be authentic but poses potential dangers in an interactive museum environment:

> 'erm the machine of the 1930s would be erm a power machine (cough) even quite a small printers would erm probably have a line shaft, if he [sic] didn't have a line shaft it would probably have been a treadle-operating machine erm so no as I say the main concern about the actual machine side is the safety aspect [DB: 'Yes.'] ... even, even, with a treadle machine, that is treadle-operated, it is far too dangerous to have it where people could get their fingers in it because when the jaws of a treadle operated machine close there is enough room for a piece of paper so it makes a bit of a mess of your fingers...' (Printing demonstrator).

Such insights regarding the production (construction) of the print display distinguish between 'old' and 'new' ways of representing the past. On the one hand there is the old or traditional methods of museum presentation and attention

to historical exactitude. Therefore, *if* this was the sole aim of NMGM then a 1930s printing machine (if available) would have been in the gallery (probably encased in glass, safely away from the visitors, and with only a label to explain the object). However, the advent of 'inter-museum competition', new methods of museum presentation and the emphasis on interactive experiences means that as regards new methods, then the safe but inaccurate Albion Printing Press is the more acceptable, interactive option. Furthermore, leaving aside the safety aspect, the curator cuts through such concerns over historical exactitude and the authenticity of the Albion Printing Press:

> 'I think that one of the things museums must do mistakenly is think that everybody lives in the present and you know that everyone's sitting room of 1997 has got things in it that were made in 1997, and that is *never* the case and I don't know whether it's stretching the point or not, with respect to the printer [press], but I wouldn't be at all surprised if that ... issue wasn't continuing to be used by printers, in small print shops until the last war ... but I think it is dangerous to get into this way of thinking that we are all living as up to date as we er can' (Curator, Museum of Liverpool Life).

Clearly, the curator's comment about representation and living as 'up-to-date' as possible, is perhaps a more elastic view of 'period authenticity'. Another, equally valid way of considering this elasticity of accuracy is that attention to historical exactitude has been displaced by the curators, in order to give visitors the opportunity to 'have a go', to handle such robust relics. The workshop can be deemed a 'simulacrum' regarding the creation of a workshop which never existed, its cameo-esque portrayal of printing history, and the demonstrator's admission that it looks nothing like a printer's premises. This argument is slightly deflected, as the 'plinth' at the foot of the printing display reads:

> 'This reconstruction is *based on* the workshop of Aidan Graney, a jobbing printer in Liverpool since the 1920s' (My emphasis).

The museum worker argues that ideally to be a more plausible representation of a small printers, the display needs more space:

> '...the biggest limitation about showing anything there is the *space* that was available erm and ... so we could actually do with four times the space that [unclear]... as it is at the moment I wouldn't even say that it was representative of a small printers, it's too small even for that it needs to be *at least twice* the size. It needs three or four times the amount of type that we've got even for a small printers, a realistic small printer's [premises] ...' (Printing demonstrator, his emphasis).

The spatial confinements of the museum environment again draw out the limitations of museums as 'sites of representation', in particular, as regards how such environments are consumed by visitors. Furthermore, the demonstrator stated that some visitors had commented that the print shop was not 'scruffy enough' to be a convincing small print shop:

> Printing demonstrator, his emphasis: '... the only criticism erm is that it's not scruffy enough. It's not dirty enough ... [DB: 'Right.'] ... because as a general rule of thumb, small prun...printers were *terribly scruffy* little places er...'
> DB: 'Was that a criticism, *your* criticism or is it something say a visitor has said...?'
> Printing demonstrator, his emphasis: 'It's, it's something that *I know* and that other printers have pointed out ... the *reason* it is like that, is purely for security. If it was as scruffy as it should be, things could go missing, items could go missing and you'd never notice. The way it is now, it's scruffy, in quotes, but it's scruffy in such a way if something went walk you'd be able to pick up on it straight away or I would .., er which is my, another prime concern there is theft'

The 'scruffiness' of the workshop has been challenged from 'within' (by the demonstrator) and from 'without' (by ex-printers as visitors). Clearly in this example, the representation has been compromised by the more general concern of security. The authenticity of the print workshop has therefore been challenged by those who have direct, lived experience of the printing industry, expressing the underlying principles of the 'pleasures of consumption' thesis (cf. Mackay, 1997). Safety and security have influenced the production of the printing workshop as a museum 'text' although one can question whether this compromise will be taken

note of by many visitors. Printing as mentioned earlier was a closed shop industry therefore it is claimed that the general public have very limited knowledge about what print shops look like or what the process involves, as such one can assume that they will 'believe' what is offered at the MLL: the mass culture thesis shaping their experiences. The safety of collections is prioritised over attempts at constructing plausible representations, the objects to be accessible have been placed in 'cleansed' environments. Plausibility may therefore be more relevant than authenticity (or truth) in such exhibits.

Whilst the printing press is the central feature of the display, the 'background' setting of the exhibition has a part in producing plausible stories. The print shop has a workbench and several cupboards and cabinets to complement the printing press and to give the impression of a traditional, small, printing workshop. On the walls of the shop are various paper ephemera to add to the feeling of a working printing environment. The background is very much a secondary feature of the printing display and supports (props up) the interactive visitor experience. The printing press is pivotal to the whole workshop display in that the demonstrator moves to the cupboards for the paper and ink, moves to the workbench for the printing rollers, moves back to the printing press to carry out the demonstration and then returns to the workbench to sign the certificate for the visitor and to seal it with chalk dust. The printing press enables such movement around the whole of the workshop display to occur; the visitor's gaze follows the museum worker around the display, taking in the various 'dressings'. The museum worker acknowledges the role of the background setting:

Printing demonstrator: 'And then as regards the cupboards and the shelves, erm 99% of that is just stage-dressing... It's just there to make it look authentic. A lot of the ink cans for example are empty or that old that the ink has dried up and is totally useless so it's just stage-dressing. A lot of the stuff in the cupboards again is just stage-dressing... It's just to make them *look*'(his emphasis)
DB: 'So the cupboards are not from the same period as the printer?'
Printing demonstrator: 'Well, it's designed to look like that... I mean a lot of it *isn't* 1930s and simply because you just can't get hold of it, erm, most of it is like, printed ephemera and printed ephemera was basically thrown onto the fire and so the actual printed ephemera is very, very difficult to get hold of ... so it's just disguised to look like... you know ... *Fortunately* when people look at the cupboard, they only look at a cupboard and see books and very rarely pursue it any further than that. Nobody as yet has gone up and said: " Oh that's from nineteen-ninety-whatever like..." (his emphasis).

Here, we again encounter the fundamental practicalities and concessions that have to be made to try and offer a plausible, referenced exhibition. The notion of stage-dressing is crucial to the examination of the production and consumption of this heritage experience. The background is 'dressed-up' for the benefit of the audience. Moreover, the demonstrator notes that its inauthenticity has yet to be challenged, which contradicts an earlier statement regarding the 'scruffiness' of the workshop being questioned (the background *is* taken notice of and commented upon by visitors). Stage-dressing can be linked to wider changes in attitudes towards museum interpretation and the move towards contextualisation, explanation and providing visitors with 'experiences'. However, in this display it is apparent that such attempts to dress the display are made difficult by the fact that much of value from printing in the 1930s (especially paper ephemera) would have been destroyed. One can draw parallels with Porter's (1988) argument regarding the limitations to historical accuracy and representation being influenced by what was deemed worthy of preservation and conservation at the time. Porter uses the example of the representation of women in museums, particularly in the 'domestic' sphere of the home. Porter states that regarding household objects, the opportunity for misrepresentation exists as only ceremonial or treasured

objects remain; objects for 'work' were used until exhausted, then thrown away, hence, 'what remains for the museum to collect is unrepresentative of everyday existence' (1988:110). The printing industry seems to have suffered the same fate: 'everyday' objects were not considered valuable enough to be saved and therefore affect and condition the dressing. Moreover, such an argument has implications about the stories told in heritage environments based on surviving relics, on oral history and on the use of replicas.

Stage-dressing connects with postmodernism's 'surface gestures' (Rodaway, 1991) as the dried-up, useless (but useful as dressing) inkpots signify the depthlessness of the background setting. It is through the demonstrator's voice, the video and plinth that the interpretation and understanding of the printing industry reaches any depth, the objects being storied (where the messages are essentially 'true') by such sources. The stage-dressing is inauthentic pastiche disguised to give the impression of a small print shop: the background is to be glanced at, rather than gazed upon (unlike the printing press). Interestingly though, the stage-dressing has been considered sympathetically by both the demonstrator and the curatorial staff; despite the lack of 'period' exactitude regarding the printing press, the background to the workshop has been historically contextualised. Commenting on the workshop 'dressing', the museum worker concedes:

> 'The only problems I had was with what I could actually stick on the walls erm... some stuff they [the curators] knocked back because they said that it wouldn't have been erm available at the time.... I mean other stuff such as erm anything about the Titanic for example, was still erm too much of a *raw*, sore spot to have that hanging up ... Titanic or the Lusitania because we are only talking what, erm ... 20 years since the Titanic had gone down, a bit more than 20 years, and about the same for the Lusitania because there was only three years between them something like that ... so when anything to do with that ... So what is up on the walls is as near as possible err ... 1930s stuff or *pre*-1930s

> erm (sigh) ... I would like actually to put some different posters up but I am going to have to seek guidance from [the curators] ...' (Printing demonstrator, his emphasis).

Trying to gauge the feel or mood of society at the time, (giving the right 'impressionistic' view) the curators had to decide whether certain things would have been on display in a 1930s print shop. The museum worker has detailed knowledge about the printing industry but in contextualising this knowledge (for example, in gauging the 'attitudes' of the time), the curators furnish the display with their authority and broader historical knowledge and interpretation. The demonstrator is also aware of curatorial responsibilities such as safety and security, therefore I feel that this role between oral historian (as demonstrator) and 'expert' (as curator) has become increasingly blurred.

In terms of constructing a plausible representation of printing history, the three 'bases to authenticity' have come together: the printing demonstrator (as oral historian), the printing press (as artefact) and the curatorial staff (for context). In a similar vein, these three 'bases' are also present in the oral history school workshops. The chapter has also consider how visitors may potentially experience such 'texts', in particular noting the 'pleasures of consumption' school of thought and the mass culture thesis.

The workshops put on at the Albert Dock by the adult education group are also attempts at writing the past and constructing plausible stories. It is necessary to examine how these workshops were brought together to portray convincing stories. As mentioned earlier, the group had been asked to put something on at

the museum which related to the history themes covered in the National Curriculum. To this end, the group produced two workshops, on 'life during the war' and '1930s childhoods'. The workshops comprised of scenes written to interpret and contextualise the artefacts and events discussed. The backdrops had been drawn by one of the group members and could be said to be 'stage-dressing' similar to the background to the printing display; as chalk drawings they were obviously inauthentic, in contrast to the printing display's efforts to construct convincing props.

The 'Children of the Thirties' was the first workshop to be produced and performed. This workshop was divided into four separate scenarios - each focusing on a different theme, with a narrator guiding the audience through the scenes. The subjects tackled were: rag rug, bath night, wash day and the corner shop. When asked to comment on why these particular themes were chosen the initial response hinted at romanticism:

> 'Ah well I feel that we were there ... we belong there you see we could relate to all that was happening and this, that and the other.... I was the eldest of a large family and you know bath night that was a night to remember you know so I think we were there ...' (Adult education group member).

In writing the past (as a text) for children to experience, at the same time, the process of reminiscence inherent in the production of these workshops suggests that the women's group are at the same time becoming immersed in a pleasurable experience. This response from one of the members indicates how the women were writing their pasts as 'eventful' lives, now seemingly remembered with affection. And yet, it remains that these workshops *are* all about being there, lived experience and living memory:

'Actually what we did as well we we brought a lot of things into it... you know we discuss mainly our lives ...' (Adult education group member).

Moreover, the ladies employed a strategy which they had called the 'time line' with the purpose of getting the children thinking about 'travelling' back through time:

'...what was in our mind though Maeve if you remember at the time was ['it was things'] we were trying to get them back ... we were trying to transport them back ['through time'] back to when we were their age' (Adult education group member).

The workshops were viewed as a gateway to timetravel which at the same time would become a kind of 'leveller' taking the women back to their childhoods. This was an innovative approach, favoured by the group. However, while it seemed to work for a lot of the children, it was dropped from subsequent workshops. The 'timeline' illustrated the limitations and naiveté of the group, who did not recognise that children consume things differently:

'What we did was we picked out important dates through history, put them on a card and put them on the chair. And each child stood up and read it *but what we thought afterwards, what we hadn't thought of at the time* was that some children are just a little bit slower at reading than others so we dropped it this time because we thought some children might get a little embarrassed by it...' (Adult education group member, my emphasis).

The women wanted to explain the purpose of the objects and demonstrate how they would have been used at the time, rather than just saying this is so-and-so. For example, the VE Day workshop had a mock air raid take place; during this scene the women showed the children a 'baby' gas mask that was used at the time:

'And I think the fact that they used a life-sized doll to actually fit it to the baby gas mask brought it home because the photographs we've got of it really looks as the it's a baby with its legs dangling - really marvellous because things like that when they can take part and feed into you know it's all right getting hold of them - they don't work ... it's just an object isn't it? Once they know, you know the purpose of the object... they were really interested in that weren't they?'(Adult education group member).

The women needed to convey to the children the purpose of the objects. The artefacts and events discussed are contextualised in an attempt to go beyond the 'surface gestures' of the old-style museum presentation and history teaching; through oral history the depth of these interpretations is accentuated. Demonstrating the baby's gas mask by using a doll, the group explained how the mask would have been fitted, the children could see how the gas mask would have actually looked when they were being worn. The group had simulated an air raid attack and so the children became aware of why and in what context such an article would have had to have been worn and used. Could the same effect or level of understanding have been derived from merely lifting the mask up to the children and saying something like 'this was worn when the air raid siren went off'? This particular scene was also furnished by several 'true' stories of air raids and the consequences of them.

If any artefacts were unavailable, then the women made their own replicas; for example the shrapnel was made by one of the group members, yet the group had difficulty agreeing on the colour it should have been painted:

> '... they decided to spray the shrapnel [laughter] black, this so-called shrapnel was brought in ['you couldn't get shrapnel'] ... freshly sprayed with this paint... But it was fascinating over that er shrapnel because someone said I thought it was bronzy colour [laughter] ... so it shows you how you have got to be pretty careful with them' (Adult education group member).

There is a suggestion that the topics, ways of life and artefacts represented and discussed in the workshops would be understood more effectively by the children if they were related to the present. The past was 'written' in relation to the

present. The aim of the 'Children of the Thirties' workshop was to demonstrate to the children the differences between being a child then, to the present time - as much as possible they stressed contrasts and comparisons:

> 'the idea evolved round the things the...that had gone from our childhood... and not now happen. The generations that are coming up are doing different things. I mean they're all into computers now and television....and we didn't have anything like that. Our home life was centred around the fireside and you know, the little family circle whereas now they've got all outside interests to keep them going [DB: yes] ... so all the games that we played in the street, the corner shop that we went to ... the whole system has changed completely so *we thought, as a group*, our ideas all went in together and erm ...' (Adult education group member, my emphasis).
>
> 'We tried to make comparisons and with the pawn shop we said that people needed the money and they borrowed money from the pawn shop and paid it back and paid interest on it and today credit cards or bits of plastic ... so the same thing is applying except that [laughter] ... put up a house or something as collateral...' (Adult education group member).

The group express that they are portraying a collective history ('we thought, as a group'): it is no one's specific memories that are conveyed. With the VE Day workshop, the group tried to bring out the multiple ways that the war had been experienced by people, and argued that different interpretations of war were formed depending on these different positions. The group were keen to challenge the dominant public and popular discourse of war as being a glorious, heroic and masculine endeavour; in this way, it could be argued that their ethnography is more plausible because they offered a plurality of interpretations from which the audience could make up their own minds. The workshop examined what it was like to live through war time, to be at home under the threat of air raids, having to work to support both the war effort and their families. The sadness and futility of war was demonstrated, but so were the happier times.

In this section I have examined how two museum 'texts' have been written (constructed) now move on to explore how such 'texts' are performed for consumers.

5.5 *'There is a lot of front'*: performative strategies

Within heritage discourse little has been written about the performance of the past in which the voices of 'producers' (as actors, demonstrators or role players) themselves have been included. I explored this notion of interactive performance with both the printing demonstrator and the adult education group.

In his examination of tourism-related employment, Crang (1997:139) argues that 'the experiential character of tourism products, [is] such that tourism work is 'creat[ing] the right kind of experience for consumers' (Schneider, 1988:353), through an 'expressive performance' (Saleh and Ryan, 1991:325)'. In order to carry off these interpersonal encounters (between 'service' producers and consumers), Crang suggests that tourism managers look for personality and talents rather than any impersonal technical skills, and that 'once recruited, workers have to be directed into their roles' (1997:141). As such, I consider how those who work within heritage sites (performing heritage experiences) have become directed into their roles. For instance, it is necessary to consider how personality and talent shape the performance of the text. If such performers are shown what to do (becoming directed into their roles) ultimately a guided performance is produced which is inauthentic as they have been employed for their selves yet their selves have needed to be altered for the representation.

For the adult education group an important hurdle they had to overcome was regarding performing to an audience. For the group, performing was a new skill which had to be acquired. The school workshops at the museum provided an opportunity for the women to acquire new skills, but for some it was still quite a nerve-wracking experience:

> 'I have the great experience of being a narrator for the VE Day and I thoroughly enjoyed it ... but to have the experience of actually standing up and talking...to these vast amounts of school kids that came in [pause] ... it was like this sea of faces initially and it was quite horrific for me to start off with because I have children of my own and I thought they'd be a real problem but it was quite a nerve-wracking experience but wonderful when it got rolling because I felt so involved ...' (Adult education group member).

It is also significant that this 'performative role' takes a while to get used to and whilst the museum staff did have some training, the group were given a little bit of guidance, but it is more difficult to 'perform' only a few times a year, instead of daily (like the printing demonstrator). Moreover, these workshops are not a 'job' to the group, therefore one could question the effect this might have on their performances? The issue of employment and performance is important because for those for whom the performing of a representation of the past constitutes their job: it is a daily, routinised process which, when placing it within the context of consumption theory links quite strongly to the mass culture thesis of repetition within the cultural industries. In fact, the printing demonstrator has commented on how at times he has felt like he was on a production line. Such a view contrasts quite sharply with the women from the adult education course whose performances do not constitute paid employment, they are not routine, but special events and in the process of creating representations of the past for children, their

performances, through 'creative retrospection' (Finnegan, 1997) connects with the 'pleasures of consumption' thesis where the women themselves are actively engaged in the construction of these representations.

The museum worker acknowledged that the first time he interacted with the public he felt very frightened, this was attributed to his personal characteristics:

> 'Erm, frightening. Still does occasionally because I'm basically a shy person although it might not come across as that. There is a lot of front... erm.... (sigh) I also suffer from stage fright erm, so really I'm the last person in the world who should be doing this job. The other thing of course is that it is the *total opposite* to to a compositor's life' (Printing demonstrator, his emphasis).

The demonstrator's *real* self has been contained and displaced, as this performative role went completely against the grain of his former occupation:

> 'A compositor's life was to go in erm, and get your head down and work, don't look round and *certainly* don't talk and if you were caught talking you got a rollicking erm unless you had good reason. So this is the total opposite' (Printing demonstrator).

The demonstrator had gone from working in a structured industrial environment where no talking was the rule, to a more flexible routine, where they are actively encouraged to talk to the visitors and where his working day is structured or controlled by the ebb and flow of visitors to the museum:

> 'there are occasions when I miss my dinner because I'm that busy... erm, whereas, if I was in industry I wouldn't be missing my dinner, it wouldn't matter how busy I was ...' (Printing demonstrator).

Moreover, there is a suggestion of modesty from the demonstrator regarding the new skills he has acquired and the performative difficulties he has overcome:

> 'Erm, I was quite surprised, once, once I had managed to sort of, contain this, this, stage-fright and shyness, erm that I think I've become *reasonably* good at what I do' (Printing demonstrator, his emphasis).

The demonstrator seems to wear a 'mask' to contain him(self): the visitors are not exposed to the demonstrator's 'real'/private/personal 'self', instead they experience the performance of this public 1930s character. The 'mask' or different face is a coping strategy which allows him to carry out his new profession. It is also interesting to learn that despite the fact that the demonstrator has attended public speaking courses and that he has an 'educational' role in the museum, in that he is imparting knowledge to visitors, he is careful *not* to be perceived as a teacher:

> 'there was just a little bit how teachers sort of talk, talk to people. Erm, sometimes it works, *sometimes* the last thing you need to sound like is a teacher, erm, basically you need to be yourself, keep it jokey, whatever' (Printing demonstrator, his emphasis).

Here, one returns to Crang's (1997) attention to personality within the tourism service industries. The demonstrator almost challenges the 'being directed into their roles' thesis, as though this strategy can only go so far. At some point the real 'self' does have to emerge: their personality has to be revealed in their performance for some visitors to respond to the representation. In this respect the demonstrator shows an awareness of the variability of visitors who come to the museum, as opposed to a mass, undifferentiated audience, clearly there is a time, a place and an audience, to be seen to be receptive to this performance, when different faces (and roles) can be put on and performed.

When you begin to consider and unpack these issues circulating the performance of museum 'texts' it is necessary to question what the implications might be for the public reception of such texts. The audience will be confronted with inauthentic, conditioned 'faces': the mask signalling directorial involvement and

rendering their performance less real or 'true'. But, is this such a negative 'thing': without such priming or stage-managing, what kind of performance would be offered for public consumption? The adult education group highlighted their initial problems during their first workshop session: *talking at* the children revealing that training was required so that the children would get some benefit from the workshops. Similarly, the print demonstrator admits to being a shy person. Without some guidance to overcome or deal with this then his performance or interaction with visitors would be very different, perhaps less memorable or enjoyable?

For the demonstrator, the performative role requires a lot of 'front' displayed for the public. The fieldwork observations saw the demonstrator adopt almost an 'over-the-top' character in order to encourage the visitors to participate in the demonstration. However, it was quite striking that such a loud, jovial character would typify the behaviour of a 1930s printer, particularly when one considers that in industry, the printer had to remain silent, keep their heads down. By adopting the caricature as a performative guise (or a coping strategy), one could argue that this was portraying an inauthentic face. Furthermore, having observed the demonstrator going through the demonstration with visitors, it was striking how, when he was telling them about the printing industry and about working in the printing trade, that his voice changed in both pace and tone. His voice became hushed and serious, in stark contrast to his over-the-top, jokiness (his 'caricature' being displaced). But again there is a sense that within this construction of a character there is an eye on its reception, on its consumption:

> 'No I ... even, even children will look sideways at you when, when I'm sort of going through my 1930s boss's mode. You can almost hear them saying "Oh yeah?" [laughter] erm, so no ... if I think I'm going over the top and people are believing me. Unless I'm telling them the absolute truth. But if I'm acting the goat, erm ... which is basically what I tend to think of what I'm doing when I'm in the 1930s mode which is acting the fool. I think it's the only way that I *can* actually *do it*. I can't be serious about being a 1930s person ... I'm not an actor, I've no actor's training and I do have stage fright. So the only, I do honestly feel as though I'm acting the fool when I'm doing that and I *know* I'm acting the fool, erm *I* would hope that enough of that comes across so that people can see straight away that I am only acting the goat erm, whether, whether it does, I don't know, it's just something that I hope and I *assume* that they will see that. But when I'm actually giving them *facts* then, *no* I *do* want them to believe me because if it's facts then it's *true* and it's something I've researched and I know is true no matter how strange it seems like ...' (Printing demonstrator, his emphasis).

In discussing their performances, it emerged that the focus group had been advised by museum professionals in the drama and education fields to alter their methods of representing the past: they had to include the children. As such, during their performances the group tried to involve the children as much as possible, for example, by talking to the children during the scene, calling children up to help out, and also getting the children actively engaged through the range of emotions tapped into such as humour, fear and excitement. This was demonstrated in the 'pawn shop' scene:

> 'Children don't really know much about [pawn-broking]... I was a pawn broker and a real meannie, I was a real meannie and I was saying to the children, involving the children - the woman wanted seven and six 'cos you know and I was only prepared to give her five bob. I can't give her seven and six for that can I? Give her seven [loud] they were all for the poor women [laughter] [unclear] booing the [unclear] and at the end they were all bringing their coats over and asking me how much I'd give them for it [laughter] ... so you see they do get involved' (Adult education group member).

The children were actively involved in the scene, 'supporting the underdog' in an almost pantomimesque manner; the children were encouraged to respond, and were even invited to bring their coats forward to be 'valued'. For the children to be interested, involved and ultimately absorb the information presented, the group needed to do more than just talk *at* the children.

The focus group were exploring a range of emotions in both of the workshops, the producers and consumers were clearly affected by the performative strategies employed and topics discussed. Humour, fear, sadness, uncertainty were all tackled and conveyed to the children. The stories told to the children were often 'real' stories (essentially 'true'); a different 'face' was shown to the children, one serious and contrasting to the comedy role:

> '...but it was a really tremendous and the involvement and what they gave back as well. It was good fun, good fun and quite emotional at one point when erm Doris had actually done one part of the narration where a family of young kiddies ... erm their lives had been taken away during a bombing and after doing the narration a few times it was just quite sort of matter of fact to me ... and on this one time I felt as if I'd known [Yes, mmmm, yes'] ... it was so ['so sad'] and emotional ...' (Adult education group member).

During the course of the discussion the focus group had the opportunity to comment on what changes they had made during the various performances of the workshops or of any changes they might like to make. The group felt that they had to cut down on the number of scenes that they perform in each of the workshops, as they were often rushed and there was little time available for the children to ask questions. Time management was a difficult issue to rectify given the stress on involving and interacting with the children. Clearly, the women are not trained actors and found it difficult adapting to running over time or coping with the unpredictability and variability of the children participating. Time management was an issue for the demonstrator too. When the museum was not very busy (steady, slow trickle of visitors) the printing demonstrator often became involved in long (15-20 minute) conversations with the visitors, which contrasted to the busier times when the demonstration was almost like a production line, going through the motions disclosing the basic details about printing.

The group revealed how they had used children as actors within the workshop - giving them small scripted parts which had been rehearsed. This method was abandoned as the group felt too restricted incorporating the children in this way and having to stick to rehearsed scripts. The group feel that using children to hold things has the same effect as having them coming up and acting out scenes and dialogue, but allows the group to be more flexible in their performance as they can ad lib and waver from the script and yet, even though the shows will be slightly different, the context remains the same:

> 'I just want to say that a boy wrote to us, he loved getting up for the acting. It wasn't, we just called the child up to help ... and we saw everyone because we couldn't have any acting with them or conversation even because it hadn't been rehearsed, so we had to say hold that and they thought they were part of the scene...' (Adult education group member).

> 'In the beginning we did have 3 children as actors from the school nearby ... er 3 children .. and they took their part very well but it didn't work as well as it works now because we had to kind of remember our lines [unclear] ... and we can't remember our scripts so it didn't work as well actually having the children acting ... as it is when they just come up and do a couple of little things ... they only up for a very short time but they've been involved and [mmm] we get as many as possible up ... but the thing is with the scripts the first time we did them we're not actors and we are not actresses and to have such rehearsals and then to sort of lose your your cues and things it was just dreadful so we just basically now ad lib ... know what we've got to do now ... ad libs and it works ... you know. Each time you see the show it might be quite different in what we say but the context (content??) is correct and that's what matters and I think its nice having all the artefacts as well ... the old things that were in that time you see, the old baths and the old tables, and things ...' (Adult education group member).

There was disagreement amongst the group, which centred on the inclusion or amount of statistics provided for the children. One of the group members argued that statistics were needed because she had been asked a question regarding 'how many etc.' and was unable to answer it:

> 'But if you take that to its logical conclusion - they're going to get a whole pile of facts and figures ...'
> '...no I'm not saying a lot - odd'
> '*...which is what it was like when we were at school.*'
> 'odd, odd statistics.'
> '*I think we want to give them the feel of it ...*'

> 'We try and get away from statistics, don't we you know' (Focus group members, my emphasis).

The group seemed divided over how 'statistics' were to be incorporated into the workshops. For some members of the group statistics were equated with giving the impression of school, which they wanted to move away from in the performances. They wanted to convey the feel rather than overload the children with too many figures. Observing the printing display, the statistics issue arose, as visitors seemed keen to put things into a 'weights and measures' style of understanding. Is there some inherent security or sense-making of the representations provided through the inclusion of statistics? Does providing statistics suggest authority and verifiability of knowledge?

5.6 Summary

This chapter has looked at the construction of plausibility via two museum representations. I have illustrated the concessions and negotiations that have been made during the course of the construction of these 'texts', to allow public access to the display, and also in facilitating public understanding of the 'text'. The chapter has concluded with an examination of the ways museum displays are performed. Here, I considered the medium used to convey the message (such as fear, humour, caricature) and also discussed the experiences of those actually performing for public consumption.

Chapter 6: Making sense of consuming the past

'A web of interpretation is thrown over the experience of mass culture, but it is a web which is not informed by utterances from the consumers themselves' (Ley and Olds, 1992:181).

'... we know relatively little about just how people do use and respond to heritage sites ...' (Urry, 1996:54).

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, attention is paid to the reception of representations of the past, as the 'readings' of the museum 'texts' studied in this thesis are critically examined. Previous chapters in this study have had limited concern for the reception of heritage representations: two key theories within the consumption literature (the mass culture thesis and the pleasures of consumption view) have only been briefly addressed. In focusing on the 'readings' of curatorial attempts to write the past, I examine whether these 'traditional' consumption theories can successfully unpack the complexity of the producer/consumer relationship. I argue that the 'mass culture critique' and the 'pleasures of consumption' theories are too simplistic and cannot address the contours inherent in the writing and reading of museum 'texts'. As such I demonstrate how the work of Finnegan (1997a, after Becker, 1982) enables these contours and complexities to be identified and analysed. I argue that museums can be viewed as 'art worlds' which consist of 'collaborative networks' where recognised cultural conventions operate, shaping participants' behaviour. Applying the 'art world' model to the writing and reception of heritage offers a framework from which the construction of meaning in the process of museum visiting can be investigated.

6.2 Are visitors duped?

In previous chapters I have suggested that critics of the heritage industry made connections to the mass culture critique as they viewed those drawn as consumers to heritage attractions as passively accepting and believing everything placed before them, in particular the bogus, sanitised constructions of times past. Moreover, Ley and Olds (1988; 1992) argue that 'cultural dupes' are not as evident on the ground as mass culture theorists suggest in their 'nonempirical speculation'. By considering 'utterances from the consumers themselves' (Ley and Olds, 1992: 181) I am able to investigate the claims of such theorists and consider how people respond to representations of the past: are visitors simply 'hapless dupes', or do they critically engage with the stories offered at heritage sites to 'make sense' of the past. I look for evidence to support or refute such a theory.

Typical responses from MLL visitors to the visitor survey question on how well were their expectations met, included:

> 'very authentic - everything like real life. Took me right back' (Female, Merseyside, Age: 35-44); 'much bigger and better than expected, very impressed, marvellous value for money' (Female, outside North West, in UK, Age: 55-64); 'excellently organised' (Female, outside North West, in UK, Age: over 65); 'very surprised and pleased - excellent day' (Male, outside UK, Age: 35-44).

A handful of responses praise the Museum of Liverpool Life's efforts at making sense of the past: the visitors' replies indicate acceptance of a marvellous, authentic encounter with 'the past', with no-one voicing concern for what they have just 'consumed' or questioning what has been put before them, who has put

it there or for what reasons. A passive response to these representations? But there are other voices too:

> 'completely, really historical - shows you what has happened - we have too many museums - turning the country into one large museum' (Male, Merseyside, Age: over 65); 'the whole country's a museum - theme parks and heritage centres. Not that there's anything wrong with it' (Female, outside North West, in UK, Age: 55-64).

Such quotations can almost be lifted out of the heritage critics' texts. The visitors express an awareness of 'the past' as having a continued, extensive and commercial presence in contemporary society through the growth of the 'heritage industry'; such money-spinning enterprise also seems to have been accepted. The consumers are mindful of the arguments perpetuated by critics, but seem more relaxed about them -- they are quite willing to accept, and express in one breath, two contradictory positions on heritage. Similarly, during a participant observation session at the Museum of Liverpool Life, a visitor remarked to me:

> 'When I look around these super museums like this, I find it sad that they are museums, that these industries have gone. They are not places of work - except for you and him. Industries have gone and even though working conditions were dreadful, like the coalminers used to grumble and now they are closed - and it's quite sad that things will never be the same again' (Field diary, 27.4.97).

Having just participated in a printing demonstration, the visitor reflects on the representation of 'industry/work' in museums. Whilst signalling approval towards the experts' efforts at making sense of the past ('these super museums'), the visitor is clearly saddened by the demise of 'traditional' industries such as mining. Moreover, her response is representative of both the conservative and radical positions (outlined in Chapter 2): museums seen as employment providers (places of work, for a few); and the radical critique: 'work' as museum artefact.

Clearly, these last two examples are indicative of a much more critically aware (as opposed to 'hapless dupe') visitor, demonstrating knowledge (cast behind reluctant sadness) of the changing role and content of museums following the demise of 'old' industries as income generators: museums as partly adopting that role. Simply highlighting this critical engagement does not mean that the 'dupe' theory is easily or totally dismissed: the response to heritage representations is more nuanced than any clear-cut polarity or dualism can suggest, and as the next two examples demonstrate.

The following comment was overheard whilst I observed the printing display and seems to reaffirm the conventional association of museums as places which tell a 'complete story', from start to finish, but also suggests museum staff have an ability to 'speed-up' the transfer of knowledge to the visitor; history to be consumed in a snapshot:

> [Woman, reading printing display 'label' turns to child]: 'Do you know it tells you all about printing down here and do you know it takes 6 or 7 years as an apprentice - that's nearly how old you are. And this man is going to show you how to do it in 2 minutes' (Field diary, 4.5.97).

The visitor expresses 'truth' as emerging simultaneously from the label and from the demonstrator. The visitor expects the museum to tell them 'all about' the history of printing. Are museums capable of such time-compressing processes: shrinking a six year apprenticeship into a two minute heritage experience? Perhaps then is a 'classic' example of a 'cultural dupe'?

Another example of 'duping' emerged during the adult education focus group discussion. This session was an opportunity for the group to talk about the production of their workshops (as seen in Chapter 5), but it also tapped into the group members' own experiences and responses to visiting the Museum of Liverpool Life. One member visited the Museum of Liverpool Life on the first day that it opened. A suffragette display was one of the special opening-day exhibitions and this coincided with this member having recently studied the suffragette movement at college:

> 'I was, *I was lost with them*, you had to march in with them. They said come on march in. And we had to march in and sit down, *actors did their bit and actresses did their part and I was agreeing with them and getting up you know* ...' (Focus group member, my emphasis).

The group member's enthusiasm and interest in the suffragette movement had initially been piqued through her college course, and upon encountering this display at the museum she got carried along by it. She talks about getting 'lost' in the suffragette display and becoming immersed in the experience; this 'depth' of involvement apparent, despite knowing that the scene was 'staged' and being played out by actors and actresses. In this context, as Ley and Olds (1992) have suggested a 'willing suspension of reality' occurred: she was aware of and accepted this staged performance, allowing herself to be carried away (bracketing out the (un)reality) and becoming absorbed in the experience.

Clearly, then, these two examples indicate more nuanced interpretations of visitor responses to heritage representations. These responses are quite different: whilst one visitor willingly accepted becoming 'lost' in the suffragette performance ('the actors and actresses do their bit') -- they did so being able to separate fantasy

from reality (cf. Ley and Olds, 1988): a more critical reading was evident, which at the same time signalled *acceptance* of the 'text'. In contrast, the visitor to the printing display believed that the total history of printing would be conveyed to them in 'two minutes'.

However, the study also found criticism and rejection of curatorial attempts at representing the past. This rejection was evident, again, during the adult history focus group discussion. At the time of this discussion, the Merseyside Maritime Museum's Trans-Atlantic Slavery exhibition had only recently been opened. One of the members (I shall call her 'June') brought this representation (museum 'text') into the conversation. The group's reactions to the exhibition implied a sense that it lay uneasily with them, for some it was quite unsettling:

June: 'But there's one exhibition I didn't agree with and that was the slavery thing ... I thought that was terrible. It was good, [to a] certain point, but it was all taken out of context...it concentrated only on the black man which is all wrong, there were people in this country who were slaves to industry, that suffered just as much...'
'but that was what it was about, the black man'
June: 'yes, but yes, at the end it only made people more er ['bitter?'] bitter, yes, it made me feel very bitter.'
'I found it very interesting'
'I did'
June: 'It was interesting, don't take... I wouldn't take any credit...'
'...I know what you are getting at...'
June: '...but it was taken out of context, it only gave you one aspect of life. There were people taken from erm this country to America, the children, people taken to Australia ... ['Barnardos']...but the thing...'
'But the exhibition was about ['transatlantic slavery']... black slavery...on blacks...'
'It was true'
June: 'Okay... but I don't like that sort of thing because it gives you the wrong idea of what life is all about...it didn't mention anything about what life was like here...'
'...no but it was...'
June: '...living pretty off the slaves... which wasn't true...'
'but a lot were...'
June: 'good things and bad things...'
'but you always get that, you have got to have compare and contrast.'
June: 'alright, if they had put the two exhibitions together, but it didn't and made one anti-white...'
'no I didn't think so at all' (Adult education group members)

'June' challenges the 'Trans-Atlantic Slavery' exhibition as being inaccurate and partial. It seems as though she either cannot or does not want to identify with this portrayal of slavery and Liverpool's involvement in this practice. In her reading of this text, June clearly reveals how the exhibition sits uneasily alongside her own interpretation and view of slavery. The challenge persists despite other group members trying to convince her of the plausibility and reasoning of the exhibition. June does not 'knock' what has been done so far, her critique is that it is incomplete: there is another story to be told, alongside the one offered for consumption. The representation as it stands now, in her eyes is 'partial'. Clearly, this response to the exhibition suggests that it is not passively accepted; June offers a critical reflection on this attempt to 'make sense' of the past for public consumption. Perhaps the exhibition has been contested because the organisers failed to recognise the plurality of the audience's geographical imaginations and also the multiple meanings attached to 'slavery' that visitors may draw upon (cf. Jackson, 1991)?

Clearly, the analysis of the 'cultural dupe' has shown that the producer/consumer relationship is far from simply one of passive consumer 'acceptance'. The mass culture thesis is destabilised even further by returning to an argument initially made in Chapter 4. In recognition of the popularisation of history/heritage, the reworking of the expert label has also splintered the producer/consumer relationship and challenged the traditional view of 'experts' being simply museum professionals and curatorial staff. It was noted how people through their 'collective enthusiasms' (Hoggett and Bishop, 1986) can become 'experts' - in

effect - *empower* themselves (rather than render themselves powerless) a process which can potentially alter their experiencing (reception or reading) of representations of the past. This process is exemplified, again, through the adult education group member who participated in the suffragette demonstration. This member had gained extensive knowledge about the suffragette movement through her college studies, in effect, she was an 'expert' in this field and could potentially challenge any inconsistencies in the suffragette story offered for consumption. However, whilst possessing such knowledge (and 'power') she still became actively 'lost' and immersed in the demonstration. As such, here is an example which illustrates the difficulties and problems that exist in trying to make simple assumptions about how people use and respond to heritage representations. Clearly, then, for the purpose of this current study the 'cultural dupe' thesis has been quashed and the mass culture critique rendered too simplistic for any critical examination of the complexities inherent in the producer/consumer relationship.

The 'pleasures of consumption' approach emerged during the 1970s, as a reaction and challenge to the 'mass culture critique' as evidence from qualitative research began to show that: 'rather than being passive and easily manipulated ... young consumers were active, creative and critical in their appropriation and transformation of material artefacts' (Mackay, 1997: 6). The 'pleasure of consumption' school was influenced by the work of de Certeau (1984) who set out to 'to celebrate the creativity of consumer practices' (Mackay, 1997: 6; see also, Fiske, 1989; 1989a). The pleasures of consumption view rejects, critiques and challenges the mass culture view of consumption. In this study, due to the

nature of the heritage sites used, the connection between oral history and the 'pleasures of consumption' perspective is particularly dominant: all three sites in various capacities offer visitors opportunities to draw on their own oral history through the representations of 'recent' history. The research findings have revealed that visitors did not necessarily accept all the stories and exhibitions constructed for their consumption. One visitor, based on his own direct experiences of working on the Liverpool docks, challenged the accuracy of one of the representations in MLL:

> 'The docker's hooks, I can tell you they're not right, because they are tiny little things, that you can do anything with, bales, wood, anything, and these bigger ones they've got are for straw bales and you didn't get many straw bales coming into Liverpool [laughter]. So the docker's hook is actually a small thing, probably no more than two inches across the gape, and he would be able to hang on to a crate, without splintering himself ... I used to work on Greater Howard Street. So little things like that, I notice, but I don't mind, which the average coach tripper who comes in say from Birmingham or Coventry, or wherever, you hear all kinds of accents down there, they don't know, they don't mind, those docker's hooks, are huge, no way [laughter]' (James, 65).

Here, this example illustrates how visitors, empowered by the authority of lived experience, destabilise curatorial representations of times past and lend weight to the 'pleasures of consumption' school of thought. I have applied the 'pleasures of consumption' school of thought to the reception of representations of the past and briefly demonstrated the existence of active, engaged 'consumers', however this perspective has been critiqued more generally:

> 'for its naiveté, romanticism or optimism regarding the significance of subcultural or consumer resistance; and for ignoring the vast numbers to whom shopping is *not* a pleasure. The freedoms and pleasures which are identified are perhaps more relevant to the Thatcherite 1980s than the present day, and are perhaps more applicable to the affluent. For many of us ... shopping is an exercise involving thrift, the burden of choice, and something which takes up valuable time - rather than being a pleasure' (Mackay, 1997: 6).

In addition to this critique, I have also found some dissatisfaction with applying this theory of consumption to the readings and reception of museum 'texts'. My concern rests with questioning whether the 'pleasures' label is an appropriate term to use to signify this active, empowered view of consumption. In dealing with the issue of 'what' is offered for consumption at heritage sites (see Chapter 2) the notion of 'artefactual history' (Jordonova, 1989; Urry, 1990) was put forward, where representations of the past were deemed to have been sanitised for public consumption and understanding. These representations were construed as inauthentic (due to their lack of exactitude: the inability to convey the 'true' horror of the time, for example). This inauthenticity was recognised and the limitations tolerated, particularly by those who had not 'lived through' the times supposedly being portrayed. However, even *if* a 'sanitised' version of the past is offered for consumption, for those who *have* lived through such times and who now approach these representations armed with memories as their 'cultural baggage' (their oral history), for these individuals, at least, the sanitised view offered in these public representations is no longer 'sanitised' when living memory connects (and 'reads') such representations. Whilst these visitors may be able to actively engage in the representations, ignore or override curatorial endeavours, challenge curatorial representations and be empowered by their authority of lived experience, in doing so, (in the experiencing of) the content of the displays, people's memories may not amount to the production of 'pleasurable' consumption encounters, as this view from one visitor maintains:

> 'I don't want realism. I don't want to see it again' (James, 65).

Despite these reservations, relating oral history/living memory to the 'pleasures of consumption' thesis offers an insight into how some individuals may respond to representations of the past. This connection can be cast in a positive light (certainly challenging dominant notions of 'passivity'), but it is not necessarily a celebratory outcome (a view, promoted by the 'pleasures' label).

In attempting to advance an understanding of how people experience museum exhibitions and displays I have drawn upon two key theories within the consumption literature: mass culture thesis and the 'pleasures of consumption' view (cf. Mackay, 1997). I have demonstrated my dissatisfaction with these two theories. I have been unable to fully explore the contours and complexities of the experiencing of representations of times past. An understanding of how people respond to heritage sites requires the reconciliation and integration of production and consumption, and also, recognition of the complex and nuanced nature of this relationship. Furthermore, Barnes and Duncan (1992) have drawn attention to the fact that meaning is constructed in the reading of 'texts', rather than in the writing of them. In effect, consumers *produce* meaning in the experiencing of representations. Clearly, the 'producer' and 'consumer' labels no longer seem appropriate in this study.

At this point, I am faced with three dilemmas: rejection of traditional consumption theory; rejection of the producer/consumer labels; and the need to find a way of presenting a more sensitive understanding and appreciation of the writing and reception of representations of the past. In resolving these dilemmas I have

drawn on the work of Becker (1982) and Finnegan (1997a), to advance Becker's model of 'art world' to the understanding of the experiencing of heritage.

6.3 Museum as 'art world'

The work of Ruth Finnegan (1997a) and Howard Becker (1982) offers a more appropriate framework to evaluate the writing and reading of museum 'texts'. Both Finnegan and Becker examine the production and consumption of music, however, in Finnegan's (1997a) case, Becker's (1982) key theories and concepts have guided her study. Becker develops a:

> '...view of *art as collective action* to suggest a perspective on music and other forms of performance which focuses on the collaborative networks that make up an 'art world' whose practitioners jointly recognise and deploy shared artistic conventions. This then leads into a *performance- and ritual- based* view of cultural activity, which can be extended not only to music but to other cultural activities' (Finnegan, 1997a: 117-118).

For both Finnegan and Becker, music is a cultural activity which inherently involves 'collective action' through 'collaborative networks', which result in making up an 'art world'. With music as the focus of their studies, 'collective action' is referring to the production/performance (the *making* of music) and the response to such activity (i.e. audience reaction). 'Collective action' is deemed conducted through a 'collaborative network'. Finnegan includes instrument makers, venue organisers and the audience as examples of the 'collaborative network' of support for music. In this respect, 'the collaborative network' as a support system has a wide scope, extending beyond simply the composers, musicians and audience. Substituting museums for music as a cultural activity, 'collective action' implies the construction (and performance) of representations of times past as well as the 'experiencing' of such exhibitions and displays.

Considering the 'collaborative network' for museums, the scope is much wider than curators or even visitors, as amongst others, education officers, visitor service managers, demonstrators, role players, conservationists, ticket sellers and publicists constitute the network of support for those involved in museums: such networks are deemed 'art worlds'.

For Becker and Finnegan, it is suggested that within these 'art worlds' particular conventions exist:

> '[Becker] ... brings home vividly how artistic practice rests on culturally established rather than 'natural' conventions. What is taken as given in one 'world' may be unacceptable in another. In Becker's account, the conventions within any given art world both guide the participants and give that world its definition' (Finnegan, 1997a: 127).

The identification of the existence of such conventions within the 'art world' is significant in two key ways. First, by suggesting that such conventions give definition and characterise a particular art world allows for a more nuanced and sensitive appreciation of the subtle differences and/or commonalties in existence within such worlds. Finnegan charted the cultural conventions within the music 'art world'. Her study noted how classical, jazz and rock music had contrasting 'conventions' for example, with regard to being professionally trained to play an instrument, composition, reading music scores, audience participation and behaviour. Moreover, such variance within music is suggestive of a plurality of art worlds within the music art world. In considering the variety of types of museums/heritage attractions (as suggested in the 'heritage spectrum') such plurality (of art worlds) within the museum art world equally could be said to exist. For example, 'old' style museum representations which directed visitors to

passively gaze on glass-encased artefacts, contrast to 'new' style contemporary methods of display where visitors are encouraged to become more actively involved in the representations (participating in demonstrations, pressing buttons, handling artefacts).

The second key argument to make is Finnegan and Becker's suggestion that these conventions promote guidance, as though they are responsible for influencing people's behaviour within the parameters of this art world. Such conventions are deemed to be observed, accepted and adhered to, generally going unchallenged but at the same time being susceptible to change over time. Moreover, Finnegan (1997a) contends that the participants of these worlds are largely unaware of such conventions. Finnegan maintains that during the course of her research, in her discussions with participants in the music 'art world' she had to 'raise' such conventions with them. To this end, the existence of these observed (and yet unrecognised) conventions within such art worlds reiterates an argument made earlier in the thesis (Chapter 4) concerning how people tell their life stories. The construction of personal narratives, according to Finnegan (1997) is also guided by cultural conventions (for example, storying through events and heroics). However, in the process of 'telling', the individual is unaware that their story has been shaped by these conventions.

Finnegan (1997a) offers a 'performance and ritual' based view of cultural activity within the music 'art world' where the very nature of performance (and the way the audience respond) to such performances is the key concern. Finnegan

downplays the notation/textual/verbal tendencies of song words and music scores, instead she highlights the highly interconnected nature of the collaborative networks within the art world arguing that performance 'can be analysed as 'communicative events' in which all participants play essential parts rather than just transmission from performers to recipient audiences/spectators' (Finnegan, 1997a: 137). An active and shared performance unfolds which constitutes a deeper embodiment (than, say, verbalised or cognitive messages) from those involved, who adhere to the observed and accepted conventions which characterise an art world:

> 'Collective performance, finally, given a potentially deeply experienced medium through which people cannot only experience, but display and validate, their own emergent 'reality' in multifaceted bodily ways that go beyond the narrower channel of language' (Finnegan, 1997a: 137).

In casting the museum as an 'art world', such a 'performance and ritual' based view of cultural activity can be applied to this current study. In this view the construction of meaning in the process of museum visiting is deemed *more* than simply the writing and reading of labels attached to artefacts. This process, as demonstrated earlier in the chapter is more complex than simply a 'transmission' from producers to consumers. Indeed, in recent times, curatorial endeavours have sought to create a medium (through offering representations which have hands-on, demonstrators, role-players etc.) whereby opportunities for visitors to become actively involved in shared performances, have allowed for more diverse and highly interconnected relationships to unfold.

To this end, the 'art world' model offers a framework from which the complexities underpinning the experiencing of museum representations can be identified and analysed. Furthermore, the 'art world' model itself needs to be cast within broader arguments guiding this thesis, in particular, the notion that museums are ethnographies (in terms of the *material* writing of history). In Chapter 4, this process of writing history was positioned within the constructionist theory of representation. The process of 'writing culture' was deemed to involve the use of 'expressive tropes, figures and allegories that select and impose meaning as they translate it' (Clifford, 1986:7). In the 'art world' model, cultural conventions circulate museums. Therefore, in order to identify, exemplify and analyse these conventions, it is appropriate to cast such conventions as 'tropes'. In this way, the use of tropes, facilitates the understanding of the processes inherent in constructing meaning and shaping the behaviour of museum visitors.

6.4 Making sense of the writing and reception of heritage: 'conventions' as tropes

i. Museums as 'activity spaces'

The first 'cultural convention' identified is the notion of museums as being 'activity spaces'. In recognition of the 'new museology' (Vergo, 1988) and arguing that the sites used in this study can be cast under this label, it is evident that people's behaviour (whilst certainly being far from uniform) has been guided

and influenced by the changing (and expected) style of museum exhibiting and display:

> DB: 'What methods of display did you like ... what appealed to you?'
> Ann: 'I think we all like pressing buttons....'
> Brian: 'We all like screens these days.'
> DB: 'What do you think of them [demonstrators]?'
> Ann: 'They are quite fun actually.'
> Brian: 'We rather like it because they ...
> Ann: '...they draw a picture. Get the whole picture.'
> Brian: 'Get a response as well of course. If you've got something in your mind, how do you do that or how do you do this ... if you don't ask the question someone else will ask the question for you. So I think it's good in that respect...'
> Ann: 'Seeing it is much better - brings it to life more. *Way of showing has changed, used to be literally walking around.*' (my emphasis)

Here, the shifting nature of conventions is apparent: they can change over time (cf. Finnegan, 1997a). Recognition amongst visitors that contemporary museums are distinctly different from what they remembered as children was quite a common response: this reveals an awareness of the shift from 'old' to 'new' museology, if not expressed directly as such by visitors. Contemporary museums and heritage attractions allow visitors to touch and handle objects and artefacts, which contrast to old-style museum exhibiting. Hence, the trope of 'passive observation' gives way to the trope of 'active engagement'. Moreover, such activity and handling, characterising the 'new museology' has now become *expected* amongst visitors: it is now seen as conventional to be able to touch some (if not all) of the artefacts displayed in museums.

In recent times, museums have taken their place within the growing tourism and leisure industry, but, moreover, they have also become increasingly in competition with other components of this industry such as amusement parks. Clearly, then, in the process of constructing meaning, museums are also expected to entertain. This

study has revealed that visitors are aware of (and expect) different types of activities or points of engagement within museums, whether it be labels to read or more 'hands on' encounters. In fact, the positioning of museums and heritage attractions as being integral features of the leisure-landscape is most convincingly expressed by children's appraisals of school visits to museums. The children adopted 'theme-park' analogies in their discussions of their experiences, in particular these surfaced when they were critiquing the representations of the past at Wigan Pier:

> 'I thought the barge was a bit ... it never went anywhere really, it just went *down* and there wasn't much apart from being on the boat and travelling down'; '...the coal mine, well when we went in ...['That was disappointing'] ... yes, I thought it was going to be a bit more things, it was very short ... ['Too short, yes'] ... Like all the other things that we did were nice and long, but it was just going round'; 'I didn't really like, you know, when we went into that room with the washing, I didn't like ... ['... with the slides'] ... it was a bit boring ... this trip. When you are at our age you like to see and do, instead of just sitting about listening to people talking ...'; 'Well yeah, but I didn't think very much of the mine. I didn't think that was very good. [DB: Why?] 'Cos it was short and there wasn't any real, sort of carts in there. Usually you'd have carts in there. No one was digging. You'd expect to see people digging, but no one was digging, they were just standing there looking at tunnels'; 'I especially didn't like the boat, it was going too slow'; 'I liked the boat but it went really slow. It just slowed us down. If it went faster I'd have enjoyed it more' (School children).

The children's expressions were of speed (fast/slow), participation and wanting things to be more 'animated', rather than being static: asking heritage attractions to be more 'themepark' in their representations (attempts at making sense of the past). The children's criticisms indicate that children place museums and heritage attractions within the broader arena of the leisure/amusement industry (there to entertain as well as educate) and for this group of children the encounters offered did not meet their own conventional expectations (what they are used to). These expectations being on a par with entertainment, excitement and action found at fun fairs and themeparks.

ii. Museums as spaces for 'social interaction'

Museums are viewed as 'social spaces': they are places to visit usually with friends and relatives, or as part of organised trips (for example, school visits). People do visit museums alone but from the field observations this is a minority of visitors. The qualitative field research highlighted the social nature of museum visiting: the consumption experience is shaped by those accompanying visitors to the museum. As such, the trope 'social interaction' can be used to document and illustrate a key feature of museum visiting.

For example, the day I spoke to Joan, she had come to the MLL with her husband and three grandchildren, although she also mentioned to me that she had visited on other occasions with her sister. Joan and her family spend a lot of time at the MLL and at the Albert Dock site more generally (i.e. there was no sense that this visit was being 'rushed' at all), it also became clear from our conversation that Joan would tell her grandchildren about her memories of her experiences of the Dock area when she was younger. The grandchildren were clearly being given a personal, unhurried experience of the museum/place.

Whilst on this occasion the children's visit has been shaped by their grandparents' stories, in a similar vein, the grandparents visit has been shaped by accompanying the children around the museum. In fact, their experience may have been impaired by taking their grandchildren to the museum, as Joan concedes:

> DB: 'Have you been in when the printing demonstrator has been in?'
> Joan: 'I don't think so no... we've been here a number of times, of course, if I'm with Jordan I have to watch him 'cos he's all over the place you know, we've got to keep looking at him.

Joan acknowledges that accompanying children to the museum often deflects their attention away from what the museum has to offer but she does not seem to mind this as the social nature of museum visiting means that it is just as important spending time with her grandchildren than paying close attention to all the representations offered for consumption.

In this study, the case study sites offer representations of the past which for many visitors can be located in the sphere of living memory/oral history. As such, in addition to museums as being places of social interaction, inherent in this relationship is the process (or 'trope') of reminiscence.

On the whole the ability for the Albert Dock area and the Museum of Liverpool Life in particular to evoke people's memories of times gone by was cast in quite a positive light by visitors. Here, this is where the 'pleasures of consumption' thesis seems to be conveyed quite strongly as people's memories are prompted, either from the site itself or from representations within the built environment. People's memories of places, people and events that happened in Liverpool swim to the surface as they respond to the representations within the museum. However, the ability to use the Museum of Liverpool Life as a gateway to remembering times past does not necessarily have to rely on local knowledge, for instance the printing demonstrator recalls meeting other printers from outside Liverpool who have had their memories 'jogged' by the print workshop display. Undoubtedly, reliving times past is a very personal endeavour. For Joan, the museum displays provoke deeply personal memories of times gone by:

> Joan: 'I like the room where the parlour place is. I think that's excellent and I think where my father used to sit, always in his special chair, by the fireplace and there was five children in our family and mother used to say when he walked in [whisper] 'Father's come in, get off the chair' and you had to, you didn't mind, I mean, nowadays 'What?', you just automatically, and his slippers were in the corner and his little stool with his bits and pieces on and you just automatically moved out of dad's chair and that was it. But that sort of thing reminds you.'

It is striking that people only need to focus on the tiniest of details to cultivate a sense of recollection. For Joan it is simply in the positioning of the chair in the parlour display, that allows memories of her father and the conditioned and respected behaviour that characterised her childhood to return.

For another visitor, the museum did not carry enough information about the overhead railway, which would have taken him back to other times:

> Brian: 'Yes, there are one or two things that I would have added a little bit more of but that was only from a personal point of view ...'
> DB: 'What would you have added?'
> Brian: 'I only found one little bit of information about the overhead railway ... I think that was a masterpiece and a disaster. It was a disaster when they took it down, I'm sure from a tourist point of view now, they'd love to still have it without the same amount of activity going on ... I was a little disappointed about that ... I really would have been going down memory lane if I'd have seen a bit more of that ...'

Both Brian and Joan have their recollections directed towards present day concerns, whilst Brian suggests that the overhead railway would now have made a good tourist attraction, Joan contrasts her behaviour as a child with her perceptions of children's attitudes and behaviour today.

The introduction of a new kind of visitor ticket by NMGM seems to have prompted a change in the conventions circulating how people view and use museums. NMGM have recently introduced a new ticket for visitors to their museums. It is called the NMGM Eight Pass and is valid for one year from the

date of purchase, offering visitors unlimited entrance to eight NMGM museums and galleries. On the whole, most of the visitors whom I interviewed during the course of the field research seemed to regard the introduction of this ticket in quite a positive manner, if anything, from these conversations it could be argued that NMGM seem to have solved the problem of visitors having to pay to enter museums (museums supposedly being a free, public service): the ticket is seen as value for money. Having a ticket which allows unlimited access for a whole year from purchase has changed people's behaviour and attitudes towards museum visiting, in particular, the trope 'spending time' characterises this change.

One of the difficulties to emerge when conducting qualitative research at the Museum of Liverpool Life was that approaching visitors either to participate in a questionnaire or interview, the reasons for refusal often centred on them arguing that they did not have enough time to spare and as such it became increasingly clear through examining the responses of visitors who were willing to speak to me that time to spend had an important role in shaping their consumption of the museum. For instance, one can contrast the way one visitor, Stephen, a local student, visited MLL just to look at the one gallery which documented the suffragette movement. His museum pass, being valid for a whole year provided him with unlimited opportunities to return to the museum and view more of the galleries and exhibitions. This practice was reiterated by another visitor, Joan, who informed me that she was a regular visitor to the Albert Dock museums and was often accompanied either by her grandchildren or other family members. The ticket allows people to have more time (in terms of increased opportunities) to

spend at and respond to the representations offered: these visits are not rushed and visitors do not feel that they have to pack everything into the 'one' day.

However, in these examples, such a *practical* increase in opportunities is only really open for those who are local as I briefly spoke with two visitors from Slough, who were only visiting Liverpool for the day. They had one day to 'fit everything in' and were slightly annoyed by the layout of the MLL. The museum does not have a logical route to follow; it is not 'sequential' and as such the feelings expressed by these visitors were that because there was no logical order to the museum, they might have missed something or overlooked a gallery. As such, moving from the general trope of 'spending time' (and increasing opportunities to spend time), another convention to emerge from speaking to non-local visitors is identified under the banner of 'acquisition'. Here, visitors to the museum have an agenda or itinerary which is constructed around the constraint of time, and which influences their attitudes towards and behaviour within the museum. For example, these two visitors from Slough, had a limited amount of time to 'do' the MLL (to 'tick' it off their list and move on to the next one). However, the layout of the MLL is not necessarily conducive to visitors following such an agenda (and who need an easy to follow, start-to-finish guidance, to have 'done' it). Clearly, unpacking 'time to spend' as a convention shaping behaviour, it is evident that those with more time to fill will respond in a more positive manner to the museum layout; for those with a limited time framework, they emerge from the museum questioning whether their experience has been 'completed'.

iii. Museums and 'identity'

The qualitative data found how the possession of a sense of belonging influenced people's use of and reception to representations of the past. Here, the trope of 'identity' (formation/construction) shapes museum experiences. In responding to the representations contained within the Museum of Liverpool Life most of the visitors who were interviewed in various ways tapped into the notion of how the insider/outsider status undoubtedly guided people's ability to respond to such representations. The possession of local knowledge was seen as empowering visitors (giving them the authority) to either accept or reject curatorial interpretations of *their* city and *their* lives. Local knowledge was seen as being able to determine whether they regarded the portrayal as an accurate or a true reflection:

> DB: 'Has anything challenged any preconceived idea you might have had about Liverpool and its people, obviously being a Liverpudlian yourself ...?'
> Stephen: 'No. Not really.'
> DB: 'Do you feel it is an accurate portrayal?'
> Stephen: 'No, from the bits I've seen, I would have to say no. Erm, I've only seen bits... Gis a job ..Toxteth riots ... but no, it gives a fair reflection but it's only selective bits.'

As someone with local knowledge, this visitor argues that the museum has only tapped into *partial* aspects of the city's history. Moreover, there is also a sense that curatorial efforts have failed to tell them anything 'new' or to challenge their own deep rooted perceptions and understanding of Liverpool (their sense of place). In contrast to this view of a selective interpretation of Liverpool's past, other visitors view the portrayal in the museum as an accurate and positive overview of the city's history:

> Steve: 'I do yeah, I think they do, it's always had a sporty background, horse racing, football etc. and everything, then you've got the troubles, the strikes and ...'
> Kate: 'I think it reflects the passionate side of Liverpool (Steve: 'Yeah.') ... from the supporters, they'd always be the last to give in.'

Steve: 'Very strong-willed people. Sometimes that can be portrayed negatively - not necessarily, they'll fight to the end - that's where the sport comes in they are very strong minded and their aggression comes out. It's very good and they've portrayed it very well.'

These visitors are very supportive of the museum's attempts at representing the city's past. It is clear that they are expressing two concerns, first an awareness of and sensitivity to the negativity usually reserved for portraying Liverpool (not necessarily in museums but the 'stereotype' constructed in other media portrayals) and second, the role of museums as being places which can influence outsiders' perceptions of the place. Here, the visitors are almost articulating a sense that museums are regarded as where 'truth' resides, and therefore, if outsiders do visit museums and see positive portrayals of the city this will help to counteract the negative constructions of the city's image. Such a sentiment is repeated by another visitor:

DB: 'Do you think they are more of value to tourists, people coming from outside Liverpool?'
Stephen: 'Yes, to get a picture of what that town or city is really like rather than the ones they usually have read about, the negative side.'
DB: 'I mean what do you think they can do for someone from Liverpool.'
Stephen: 'It should confirm what they already know if they have been taught it right at school in the first place.'

And yet, another visitor expresses discomfort even with these supposedly positive representations of Liverpool:

James: '... And also I wish Liverpool was famous for more than the Beatles, that annoys me, there's not one mention down there of who started the guide dogs off... I think we should be famous for that, not the Beatles, and Gerry Marsden, and all that. I know it's popular, but there's more to life than a hard day's night.'

So even in terms of representing Liverpool in a positive light there are grounds for conflict and contestation. Whilst such images (like the Beatles) are seen as tourist images, drawing visitors into the city, for some local residents there is resentment

that this 'stereotype' is all that the city has become, its other contributions to national life (and identity formation) are obscured or forgotten by these popular images.

Whilst some (local) visitors have suggested that the Museum of Liverpool Life will challenge negative perceptions of the city, other (local) visitors argue that the content of the Museum of Liverpool Life lacks relevance for those who do not possess local knowledge:

> Brian: 'Well I think it's quite good - if you are from Liverpool ... I'm not so sure it'll be as interesting to an outsider. Erm, I don't know ...'
> Ann: 'I think 'cos going round it, you, we can say "I remember that"'... '"I know where that is"' ... remember certain parts of Liverpool.'
> DB: 'Do you think it relies on having Liverpool knowledge to ...'
> Brian: 'No, no .... it doesn't rely on it. I think it is certainly more helpful to a person from Liverpool than what it would be to, I must say, a complete outsider ... I'm not saying a complete outsider wouldn't enjoy it, I'm sure they would.'

As such, it is as though there is an assumption that non-locals visiting Liverpool would only want a surface view of the city, that they would not be tapping into any deeper sense of the place and lacking local knowledge they would be unable to gain more than a superficial view. Here, again, the content of the MLL renders the 'pleasures of consumption' view more dominant as visitors armed with local knowledge will be able to respond in a deeper and more active and perhaps critical way than those lacking such knowledge. It is striking that in analysing the visitor responses, it seems that the only 'tangible' issue of exclusion (with regard to MLL) is the local/non-local division, issues of exclusion along 'race' or gender lines were not expressed by those interviewed. Only one visitor tapped into the issue of 'class' and museum consumption, arguing that the class barrier has been broken as regards museum visitors:

> Joan: 'I think it is good and I think it is needed. And I think people *like* them [museums] as well. Do you? A lot, you know, good. A good cross section of people as well, not just, years ago I would say it was the upper classes that went to the museums, not the middle class or any others, the working class, but now I think it's a good general section of them. Do you?'

One visitor whom I interviewed seems to have turned this insider/outsider division on its head:

> James: 'I left Liverpool when I was 18, joined the navy, now at that age, all I knew of Liverpool was, docks, football, clubs, the temple, [unclear], having a laugh. I am now 65, I came back two years ago, as a stranger, seeing Liverpool. The older side, the other side of it, the grown up side, the side that's been preserved, if you like and I have been in places that I never thought I could get in. I've been in the town hall, the Liver Building, I've been in Liverpool, erm, used to be called Custom House, port of Liverpool building, Mersey Docks and Harbour Board as it was, and this place has been done up and I used to work in warehouses and so to see them all done up, is funny, but I'm enjoying it. '

Here, James had local knowledge, at one time, but one can argue that having been away from Liverpool for such a long time, he is now returning to the city and has become caught up in a quest for rediscovery (seeing things through new eyes) and holding a different perspective. For Joan, she acknowledges that her family have a strong interest in local history, and visiting the museums at the Albert Dock is merely one source that they draw upon:

> Joan: '[my]husband ... he's just got himself a book ... all about Liverpool, erm, recorded in 1932, of the shops that were there, doctors and the pubs and we were quite interested in going through where we live locally now. We live near Walton Hospital and it sort of looking at all the shops, I remember them when I was at school, used go in there and I used to go in there... my daughter when she got married she had her reception in .... inside the Albert Dock there and when we are in Liverpool ... we often just come down here, have a walk round but they [her grandchildren] particularly like here, yeah, they like this museum [DB: 'Why?'] I don't know. I think it's because it's showing the old Liverpool things as things used to be... Well of course, all along here, when I was a girl. I used to go out with a couple of lads who used to go out on three week runs to New York, three week on the Mauritania ... in the Liverpool Echo these past couple of weeks, people send old photographs and they put them in and see Mauritania, in the thirties and forties, see all the people on the docks, pushing their carts and this, of course there were no motorised carts then and of course they are all milling around, big ship, and it was exactly like that.'

The Albert Dock area provokes a strong sense of place for Joan as her memories are 'layered': her younger days with the sailor, more recent family events such as her daughter's wedding reception and as a place to take the grandchildren. In effect, the museum as 'art world' could be applied to Joan's particular example as she illustrates how the Albert Dock site over the years has almost become her own little 'world' - a 'collaborative network' of memories. This art world, at various times being peopled by a supporting cast of friends and family members.

In exemplifying how the content of MLL has connected to the trope of 'identity' formation, where museums are able to shape people's perceptions of themselves and others, the accounts expressed above have focused on those armed with local knowledge or 'insider' status. However, investigating the responses of non-locals, it was clear that, the Liverpool 'identity' expressed and constructed by local visitors was not picked up by these non-local visitors. One visitor, simply suggested that the portrayal of Liverpool merely repeated his understanding of other ports and cities during the times portrayed:

> 'From what I've seen, Liverpool erm it didn't look any different, from the earliest parts shown, is no different to what I associate with any other port or city in those times. The other thing, er, what it did do was, Liverpool in World War II which was nothing out of the ordinary compared to any other city or port. I think the only thing I found out that I didn't know was Liverpool being the centre of the sugar industry.' (Michael, focus group).

> 'Well, I think they made sense to me. Don't think we needed any specific local knowledge about the place... most of the displays were explained well and like was said earlier a lot of the topics are general, could be about anywhere...' (Valerie, focus group).

Here, the identity forming capabilities inherent in museum visiting seem to be internalised -- only those *from* Liverpool picking up on the city's perceived (unique) features, associations and characteristics. Moreover, the focus group

discussion with non-local visitors, did reveal more of an association to the 'popular' (stereotypical?) media images of the city, such as the Beatles and Brookside:

> '... the only one I could relate to is Mersey Culture, erm which is erm, the football teams, which you see nearly everyday on TV, erm the Grand National, Beatles and groups, Brookside on TV erm, and that was like the culture as I erm know it, as I can relate to. Erm, the other themes, Having a Voice or something, there was noting stuck in my mind to pick that out...' (Michael, focus group).

For this non-local visitor, the Mersey Culture theme portrayed in MLL seems to merely replicate his already predetermined construction or sense of Liverpool, acquired, in part, from televisual media interpretations.

iv. Museums and 'learning'

Early in the field research, the small visitor survey conducted highlighted visitor perceptions of museums as places of education and learning. The field research identified visitors as either using the museum or heritage attraction as an 'educational tool' in either an *informal* capacity or in a more *formal* way. As an informal source of learning it is suggested that this is an additional aspect to people's visits. Here, visitors are usually accompanied by family or friends, or are on their own, and part of their visit is to 'learn more about' places, people and artefacts. There is no set pattern to this informal learning as visitors may be particularly interested in one theme or aspect of the museum's focus, or in engaging in a particular method of representation (such as participating in a hands-on demonstration) they may learn a little more about an old industry or skill, for example. Interviewing visitors did reveal that they had 'learned something' for instance, one visitor from Slough, having being through the Public

Health gallery in the Museum of Liverpool Life, commented that he now knew why Liverpool had been at the forefront of developments in and concern for public sanitation and health care (given its geography, the dockyard environment and an ever-changing and expanding population) (Personal comment, 1998). In many ways, this visitor is typifying the 'mass culture/expert' connection, relying on curatorial interpretations to gain an understanding of Liverpool's history.

However, the more formal aspects of learning within museums are equally worthy of attention. As places of education, museums and heritage attractions are visited by people at various 'stages' of the formal educational cycle. It is important to consider what these visitors bring to museums and how their 'baggage' may shape the way they respond to the heritage representations. In this study I examined the consumption of heritage by school children (between 6 and 10 years old), GNVQ students (17-19 years old) and undergraduates. It was clear that the different stages within their formal educational cycles influenced their reception of museum representations.

School visits account for a large proportion of museum visits. When school children attend a museum or other heritage attraction they are part of a formal, organised and structured visit. I interviewed a group of school children a few days before they were due to visit Wigan Pier, and asked them why they thought they should be visiting such a place, the responses from the children tended to suggest that it is almost their 'duty' (they are necessary places to visit) to go because their teacher thinks that they should visit:

> 'Oh yeah, 'cos of education and erm if you don't know much about Victorians it's a good idea to go there and you can learn what the things, the lifestyles and schools and that were about'; 'We are going to see a lot of Victorian stuff 'cos that's what we've focused on this term'; 'It was brilliant ... I thought it was very educational 'cos you learned about the life of poor people erm you saw what happened down the mines and that'; 'I thought it was a good educational visit' (School children).

There was an overriding sense that prior to their visit the children were expecting the sites to convey a degree of plausibility and simulation of the past. There was also a suggestion that they knew that these representations are not *exactly* like it would have been (not 'mimetic') but that they would be constructed as far as possible:

> 'It gives you a chance to see what it was like in olden times and when you are in the room er classroom you don't, well they shout at you but it's not *exactly* like in real Victorian times because it's against the law now to strike people with a cane'; 'So you can get a feeling what it was like then' (School children).

> 'Because if you've actually really been to Victorian times and if you come back then you'll know *exactly* what it's like, you won't have to keep going over books and Mrs Arnold wouldn't have to tell us all the information 'cos if we went there we'd probably already know' (Child).

Here, the 'enforced consumption' of the school visit is seen by some of the children as the ultimate source of knowledge, where the museum representations would convey the exact 'truth' and displace the necessity of the other sources of information that the children had been subjected to (such as books and their teacher).

During the course of the field research I conducted an interview with two GNVQ students. Whilst in many respects, they were on a very formal, structured and organised visit, their approach to the museum was quite different. It became clear that as 'tourism' students, (pursuing a career in the tourism industry) they were at the Museum of Liverpool Life merely to view the museum as a tourist (industry)

opportunity rather than as an educational tool in the sense of learning something about Liverpool's history. It was clear that these students had responded to the museum in quite a detached manner. The museum could have been anywhere ('placeless') as they displayed no interest in gaining an insight into Liverpool's history, instead the purpose for their visit was to review or analyse 'the vehicle' used to convey 'truth' for others. For example, they simply looked at the different types of display, only a fleeting interest in the printing display was expressed, insofar as they had documented the method of exhibiting printing history and its target audience but did not see it as necessary to participate in the demonstration. The printing demonstration was viewed as a distracting tool, something merely to entertain children.

I interviewed a degree level student who had decided to visit the Museum of Liverpool Life having seen an advertisement in the local press which related to his studies on the suffragette movement. In this example, the student is displaying a *targeted* use of and response to the museum. He has positioned the museum as being another potential source of information (another 'text' to be read) to help him with his university studies. Whilst recognising the museum as a potential educational tool, he was slightly disappointed:

DB: 'Is there anything you particularly liked?'
Stephen: 'Suffragettes, which is what I came to see, but there wasn't enough for me ... which is what I hoped there'd be more... I just find it, that sometimes it's a bit, erm, GCSE level, if you, a bit too basic ... [laughter] I know that ... that might be the wrong thing. I just thought it might be harder... because it's so GCSE I suppose it's just to get your interest. If they make it too heavy, they might lose someone. Obviously, works in my case ... if they've got stuff for sale which covers it in more detail ... just got a book that does actually...'

For Stephen then, there is recognition that the museum has to cater for a wide range of people with differing education levels. The museum (through its shop) provides another pathway for visitors to develop their knowledge about particular themes and topics displayed.

From unpacking the trope of 'learning' it is clear that whilst learning is a dominant feature of museum environments, it is highly differentiated (as demonstrated above) and lacks consistency. The only structure that can be placed on this theme concerns the active (critical) and passive (non-critical) distinction. Whilst Stephen's comments on the level at which museums are pitched and his response to and engagement with this level typify the active (critical) visitor, there are many who do adhere to the passive (non-critical) view, summarised in this comment:

> Ann: 'So we've done the Liverpool Museum and the Walker [Art Gallery] yesterday.'

This visitor, in expressing that they have 'done that' does not reveal whether they have learned anything, or critiqued and challenged any of the displays in these museums and galleries. Moreover, such a response reiterates the notion of 'acquisition' ('done' that) discussed earlier in this chapter.

It has been mentioned earlier in this study, that the MLL holds surgery sessions where visitors can bring objects to curators to find out more information about them. Such activity extends the trope of museums as places of 'learning', moreover, in recent times, this educational aspect of the museum's activities has been shaped by broader dimensions circulating the 'commodification of the past'. In effect, another trope has emerged: valuation. General media interest in the past

has fuelled concern for the 'commodification of the past'. Television programmes such as the 'Antiques Roadshow' have highlighted monetary value connected with artefacts. The stories woven around the artefact presented to the 'experts' gradually lead up to a disclosure of its worth. This pecuniary attitude was evident in the research. One of the curators who participated in the visitor surgeries at MLL remarked that some of the visitors who came to these sessions expected (or asked) to be given an indication of the monetary value of their artefact (Personal communication, 1995). This was also apparent when I sat in on a few of the surgeries: visitors anticipated a price being placed on their artefact, almost as a conclusion to the story being told by the curator. The monetary worth is part of the construction of meaning. Given National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside policy, curators are unable to put a fiscal value on any of the objects brought into the museum. On such occasions where a valuation is requested, the curators are obliged to decline and suggest that they go to a professional valuer. However, whilst televisual media interest does seem to perpetuate the idea of money from antiques, simply because people do want to know this fiscal value, does not necessarily mean that it is *worth* more to them than for example, the sentimental value that is attached (written in) to the artefact.

It was noted in Chapter 5 that the producers (in trying to make sense of the past for visitors (and the school children)) used the medium of comparing the past with the present. The field research also found that such a strategy (of comparing past with present) was also used by visitors as they respond to the representations offered for consumption. As such, the strategy of comparison can be linked to a

wider convention or trope, shaping museum experiences, namely the notion of museums as being a measure of 'progress'. Anticipating their visit to Wigan Pier, the children tried to relate what they had seen (or expected to see) at the heritage sites to their own lives:

> 'Er, we've been like, we've been writing about how the erm Victorians lived ... and they're not very good doctors... ['... there wasn't compared to today's standards']'; 'Well I think it is going to be very interesting you know learning about erm what erm the Victorian children had to do in those times compared to what we have to do'; 'I suppose it's going to be a lot different compared to our school er it might look a bit ... *poorer* in a way er not as much facilities as what we've got. Not much books and er different er like different teachers dressing up a different way ... er [pause] that's about it ...'; 'Stricter, like stricter teachers. Harder, maybe harder work... Get told off more often than what we do in a school like this and not like, no electricity, strange with no computers or anything' (School children).

The children compare what they have been taught about Victorian times at school with key markers of significance in their own lives, for example, electricity, computers, expected behaviour.

Relating the past to present times occurred in a few other different ways. The 'label' at the foot of the printing display reads:

> 'The printing trade: To become a printer required 'doing time', an apprenticeship of about 6-7 years. The work involved 'compositing' - making up the frames of letters to print from - and printing. Since the 1950s many of the old firms have gone, as photocopiers have been developed and improved. More recently, the industry has been revolutionised by the computer. This reconstruction is based on the workshop of Aiden Graney, a jobbing printer in Liverpool since the 1920s' (Field diary, 4.5.97).

From the field observations, I noticed several instances where visitors seemed to have misunderstood this label:

> Visitor: 'We have photocopiers now ...'
> Demonstrator: 'Think for a minute. Photocopiers produce *copies* ...'
> Visitor: '... not the original'
> (Field diary, 4.5.97);
>
> Visitor: 'See, this was before photocopiers'
> Demonstrator: 'Slight correction ... photocopiers made copies, you need an *original*'
> (Field diary, 5.5.97).

I asked the demonstrator if he was aware of any misunderstanding with the sign:

> 'Yes ... and erm, the biggest mistake that people made is by thinking that *seven year olds* were taken on as apprentices ... when it says it's 'seven years he serves his time for' ... that's the biggest mistake ... the other one I suppose is people pick up on erm the fact that the machine is flat, the Albion we use and erm and they stick that alongside a photocopier because it mentions photocopiers on there ... what I tend to do then, is just point out that the photocopier works on *light* and is basically *reproducing a photograph*, but the photocopier won't work without a copy of a printed sheet. It *needs* an original to copy ...' (Printing demonstrator, his emphasis).

Overlooking the irony that demonstrator himself has slightly misinterpreted the label, what does the misinterpretation by visitors suggests about the attention they pay to labels? It seems to indicate that the consumption somehow involves visitors drawing parallels to contemporary objects as they try and make sense of artefacts from the past. Here, direct comparisons have been made by visitors. The printing press bears *some* resemblance to a photocopier in terms of its size and the flat bed on which paper is placed. However, the underlying function of the printing press and photocopiers become confused when visitors try and substitute the function of a photocopier to the function of the printing press.

One of the focus group discussions also highlighted the issue of progress. The visitors expressed criticism and concern for the way the objects within the MLL had been organised. For one visitor in particular, the 'thematic' approach adopted by the museum was unsatisfactory; instead he would have preferred the objects to be arranged temporally, from the earliest to more recent times:

> 'I thought it was a bit disjointed, going round it er ... it could have been presented better. If they had started with the earliest exhibits first and then gone on to more recent stuff last. But it all seemed jumbled up... I mean when you went in, there were no arrows or anything saying 'go this way round', you could either turn left or right, er, looking at some exhibits about olden days, living in olden days and the next thing it was in the 70s,

then it jumped back to World War II. It wasn't set out how I'd expected it or prefer' (Michael, focus group)

'Now I thought the themes worked well - you could see how people earned a living, where they worked and stuff, then see the entertainments, how they enjoyed themselves. And then the politics bit too. It was a little difficult to work through but I did like the themes' (Frank, focus group).

The above two comments which emerged from one of the focus group discussions illustrate, on the one hand *rejection* of the thematic approach adopted by MLL; Michael, wanted a linear progression to unfold, the earliest artefacts being presented first, to gradually portraying more recent times. In contrast, Frank accepted the thematic structuring of the MLL, arguing that this was equally a straightforward way of approaching the representation of the collections.

v. Museums and 'performance'

The final convention or 'trope' identified in the qualitative data is performance. The school workshops and the printing display both illustrate how performance can shape visitor experiences of the representations of the past.

Humour featured as an important tool or method of capturing the children's interest in the workshop sessions. Humour to an extent relies on the ability of the producers to create or carry off humorous and funny characters and situations. This was exemplified by the bath night scene in the 'Children of the Thirties' workshop. The group member responsible for this scene created an almost over the top spectacle (caricature?), which seemed to pay off and break the ice with the children, getting them directly (for some) and indirectly (for others) involved in the scene and ultimately involved in the workshop. This strategy was raised in the

group discussion, but it had also been noted in the group's own self-evaluation of the workshops:

> 'Agnes here is the comedienne, she was bowling me over and she had the children roaring with laughter when she had them in the bath and when the children laugh like that and erm they sort of get into the scene and they're more eager for the next scene because it's now fun and if ... Agnes was making them laugh, she gets them in the bath and says they haven't washed behind their ears...and all this... grow spuds in them ears ...' (Adult education group member);

> 'Aggie was a natural for both bath night, bringing lots of humour into her part. It was quite emotional to hear the laughter from the children as she ad libbed her way through' (Adult education group, self-evaluation/feedback file).

Moreover, the 'success' of this strategy could be measured by the response from the children who had participated in the workshop. The letters which the group received suggest that this comedy performance was one of the most memorable parts of the workshop:

> 'I really enjoyed it in the maritime Museum. I thought it was very educational and interesting. I especially liked it when Mrs Madason showed us how the children got a bath in the tin bath. The carbolic soap smelled horrible. I loved it all and I think I speak for everyone when I say that'; 'I am writing to tell you how much I enjoyed the little play that you performed in the Maritime Museum. The bit I liked was Mrs Madison she was very funny when she said "Have a niff of that soap" in bathnight. I think everybody enjoyed themselves very much. Mrs Shaw had a nice time too. Thank you for the sweets after the play, and thanks for a great time.'; 'I like the plays you did. I hope you will let us come again some time. Thank you for the sweet. I didn't like the smell of the soap'; 'We loved the part when we had to go out and Lisa and Joey had pretended that they were geting a bath in the olding days and that was the best bit and I think every body injoyed it.' (School children, self-evaluation/feedback file).

The humour was used to prime the children in preparation for the more serious stories and scenes later on in the show; their attention had been captured:

> '... and the other children were all laughing so that when the next bit perhaps not so funny the children are not 'into it' and and so they are much more likely to take notice of the next scene even though it be a more serious one... and er I'm afraid we have to thank Agnes for that ['oh yes']' (Adult education group member).

The group acknowledges the importance of this strategy and the effect it has on the remainder of the workshop. Moreover, the group believed that the children

became so enthralled by the humorous 'spectacle' constructed, that they had almost temporarily been 'suspended' in their belief that they were in a learning environment:

> '...although it was fun they were learning what it was like ... what bath night was like in the Thirties ... *but they didn't realise they were learning*, they just thought they were having a good time' (Adult education group member, my emphasis).

The group believed their performative strategies and interaction had taken the children beyond thinking that they were in a learning environment. How could they 'know' that this was the case? There is evidence to suggest that whilst the children were enjoying themselves, they were still very much aware that this was a learning encounter:

> 'One boy said I wish all our lessons were like this' (Adult education group member)

> 'I would just like to thank you for a most wonderful and enjoyable day. I must also add the thanks about the great lesson in history. I wish all history lessons were like that. Thank you once again' (Adult education group self-evaluation/feedback file, letter from a child).

Also, again in contrast to humour, another heightened 'sensation' (emotion) is fear as both an attention grabber and involving the children:

> 'And what they did love found out is that they love to be frightened ... and we blacked it out and the first time [laughter] we told them to get down on their knees on the floor and [laughter] they were crawling all over the floor ... so eventually we just had to stop them ... and tell them. But they loved that didn't they?' (Adult education group member).

Both strategies of humour and fear were seen by the group, as regards the children's consumption of the workshops, as successful strategies or ways of learning. The children's letters focused on the smells, the humour and the participation:

> 'Thank you for the plays. It was very nice to see everyone working together it was really good I enjoyed the shop. I think they worked really hard and nice. I liked getting up and helping.' (Adult education group self-evaluation/feedback file, letter from a child).

Similarly, observing the children on the visits to Wigan Pier, the various staged performances conducted by the resident theatre company were the highlight of many of the children's visit. From the children's responses and observed reactions it was clear that they enjoyed and were absorbed in these dramas, however, the children whilst being receptive to such methods of presentation, were not swept away into thinking that they had been taken back to Victorian times, instead they expressed a sense of critical admiration for those involved in the performances:

> 'I thought they were very good. The way they could act one part and then act the other, they made it different as if you *had* to really look at them to recognise them, because it was not the same voice and ...'; 'I think ... do they have to remember all their lines 'cos I thought they'd have a sheet you know with guidelines of what happens 'cos it's got to be hard tapping into all those voices and we noticed in the first scene the rent man and then he changed to that fruit, fruit, potato seller and then he went into the school and that was him and he was really slipping into the parts'; 'Yeah and really all their faces just changed completely for different acting'; 'It was realistic though'; 'The way they were talking as if they knew it off by heart'(School children).

One child suggested that more actors needed to be employed to make the dramas even more realistic:

> 'It would have been better you know if they could have got more actors walking about buying things, you know, that would have been really good. I know it would be expensive ... to pay for their wages but I still think it would have been good ... but, there's nothing up with it' (Child)

At one point during the Victorian schoolroom performance, the fear created by the actor (as a strict schoolmaster) had clearly left a lasting impression on the children as they were able to recall some of the scene, practically word for word:

> 'The best part was when we was going into the school 'cos the teacher was kind of funny and kind of dead narky and I liked it when Mrs Arnold and the other teacher got told off for having nail varnish on. They had to stand up and go like that [demonstrates]... and then we all had to shout 'shame' and then [laughter] he said: 'You've got devil's blood on your fingers and chandeliers in your ears' [laughter]' (Child).

The children express an awareness of the actors adopting ('slipping into') different 'parts' in the various plays performed. They demonstrate an

understanding that this is their job, a routinised occurrence ('talking as if they knew it off by heart'). Moreover, it was striking that some of the children seemed to equate the past (as voiced by the actors) as having its own distinctive voice: the actors having captured the authentic voice of the past:

> 'It was really good just listening to them'; 'And the dancing, *speaking manly*'; 'It was like ... you could tell it was a dance ... it was just sounded like an *old fashioned accent* ... like was what you would *suspect all Victorians to still speak like*'; 'Good. I liked the woman in the house best 'cos I just thought she talked dead funny ... it was a dead funny talk she done ...' (School children, my emphasis).

Did people speak differently in the past? I think this reaction is probably more to do with the children (being from Liverpool) noticing the difference in their own accents to the exaggerated Wigan accents spoken by the actors, although it does highlight the fact that children do take notice of *how* things are said, rather than simply what is said.

I asked the printing demonstrator what he thought the visitors 'get out' of the printing display:

> 'Hopefully a bit of knowledge, erm a bit of enjoyment, erm and a souvenir to go home with. *What* the museum gets out of it is hopefully return visits and customers ... whose hopefully curiosity has been piqued enough to go on and do a bit of research on their own but if not a return visit .... [DB: 'Mmmm.'] of either them or their friends so ... and with the certificate, free publicity, 'cos every time they show that certificate to somebody they are publicising this museum ...' (Printing demonstrator, his emphasis).

There is a 'package' for the visitors to consume, culminating in production of a souvenir. The 'souvenir' is the certificate that visitors have printed. The certificate seems to have a dual role: whilst signifying the whole printing experience, it is thought that the visitors will show the certificates to friends and family, as they *talk* to others about their visit, indirectly promoting or publicising the museum. There is almost an extension of the performance and consumption process as the

visitors (using the certificate) re-play the heritage experience to friends and family. It is as though the heritage experience becomes tangible as the certificate is produced, the experience becomes objectified. Moreover, I found it striking during the observations of the printing display, that often visitors expected to pay for the certificate that they had printed; this impression is created when the demonstrator places the certificate in a paper bag, after he has covered it in chalkdust to seal the ink (see Photograph 6.1, below). It is as though the visitors have made a purchase, and perhaps is also a reflection of the 'commodification of the past' where the visitors perceive the heritage industry as offering nothing for free.

Observing the printing display revealed that *how* visitors approached this gallery also influenced their subsequent printing experiences. On occasions when the museum was quiet and not very busy, the demonstrator usually busied himself tidying up or printing posters and notices: his back to the gallery floor area. He appears 'at work', absorbed in the task at hand. When visitors eventually arrived at the printing display and saw this activity, a few of them remarked (to each other) that he (the demonstrator) must be working. It did not seem to cross their minds that he was a demonstrator - there to involve visitors in a printing experience. On these few occasions, those visitors made no attempt to catch his attention and eventually walked away from the gallery. At other times, visitors either tentatively attempted to talk to him, whilst others were more confident in their approach and attitude. The printing demonstrator almost instinctively seemed to gauge the 'mood' of the visitors. Those who seemed shy and unsure,

Photograph 6.1: Visitor/Demonstrator interaction, Printing Gallery, Museum of Liverpool Life

took tentative steps to the printing gallery space, here, the demonstrator gently guided them (and encouraged them) into the 'printing performance' although his 1930s boss's mask made no appearance:

> [to a man cautiously looking at the printing display]: 'Step up, have a look ... cost you nothing' (Field diary, 27.4.97);
>
> [to a 5 year old boy]: 'We are just going to paint some letters' (Field diary, 27.4.97);
>
> [to a woman, about to leave the printing area]: 'Before you go, have a go at printing.' To which, she later commented 'What evil thing am I writing? (laughter)' (Field diary, 27.4.97).

In contrast, for visitors who seem more confident and at ease, the demonstrator plays out his 1930s boss performance, with the visitors firmly cast as his 'apprentices'. Here, in these instances the demonstrator's 'bold/cheeky' face was on show:

> [to a boy who was moaning about having blisters on his feet]: 'blisters on your feet? Do you want blisters on your hands as well?' (Field diary, 27.4.97);
>
> [In reply to a man who had asked: 'What are you printing? Giving any mementoes away?']: 'What's the use of having a dog and barking yourself ... I'm doing as little as possible' (Field diary, 4.5.97).

The acknowledgement by the demonstrator, that people actually seem to like being ordered about and told what to do, connects with the 'enjoyment' observed amongst participants in Wigan Pier's Victorian schoolroom. To this end, one can draw some parallels to MacCannell's (1976) 'alienated leisure' thesis where people are receptive to (suspended in disbelief?) such contrasting experiences (of work) from their own everyday lives. Moreover, the demonstrator displays a sensitivity to the fact that some visitors probably do not want to see or feel that humour has a place in such an (educational?) establishment. He senses that they will feel patronised - as though they are unable to make sense of the display

without a parodied 'interpreter' to assist. This was reflected in the observation sessions where the 'caricature' (1930s boss's mode) was easily displaced or suspended. The demonstrator stands back, waiting for the visitor to approach him and initiate a conversation - a more straight-played performance unfolds. The parodied role does encourage visitors to have fun and not take the performance too seriously (willing them to suspend their disbelief?) as they become 'apprentices' for a few minutes, but even *within* this 'caricature' when he is being serious 'telling them the truth', his vocal tone and behaviour change (he switches back to the 'straight-played' role).

The differences in these performances (with or without the '1930s boss mask') are quite clear, however, the 'ritual' (which came through both types of performance) remained the same. In other words, what the visitors were told about printing and the process of acquiring the printed certificate remained constant. The chain of 'communicative events' (the signals emitted by visitors and picked up by the demonstrator) shaped the subsequent printing performance.

Observing the printing display it was apparent that whilst 'ritual' could be identified (in terms of much of the content eventually imparted to visitors) this information was transmitted (the communicative events) in many ways. For example, on school visits, a structured, targeted and scheduled visit would have been planned for the children. As part of a school party, children queue up for a very brief demonstration of the printing press. During the observation sessions at MLL, this scenario was frequently played out. In fact, the following remark from

the printing demonstrator was directed at school parties coming to the museum, as the demonstrator acknowledged that he could only go through his basic routine with the children:

> 'like a production line ... [in summer] no more than meeting demand. Do not feel as though doing my job - a case of sending punters away happy ... go away happy, come back again' (Field diary, 27.4.97).

In contrast, observing the printing gallery, children accompanied by parents or grandparents, usually received a more elaborate (staged) experience: the demonstrator adopted his '1930s boss's mode'.

6.5 Summary

This chapter has focused on making sense of how visitors use and respond to representations of the past (cf. Urry, 1996). The limitations of 'traditional' consumption theories, namely the 'mass culture critique' and the 'pleasures of consumption' school of thought were outlined and discussed. These two theories proved to be unable to unpack the complex nature of the writing and reading of representations of the past. As Finnegan (1997a:140-141) noted the predominant emphasis of consumption theory is passivity:

> 'still convey a implicit picture of consumption and consumers as taking the secondary role, however active; as using and reacting to the productions of others or, at best, of appropriating and fighting back - rather than as actors actively deploying generic artistic conventions to create and enact their own unique performances'.

Becker's (1982) model of the 'art world' provided the framework from which the complexities inherent in the experiencing of museum representations could be identified and analysed. Positioning museums as 'art worlds' allowed an understanding of visitor behaviour to be detected through the identification of

'cultural conventions' which are deemed to guide and shape the behaviour of those within these 'art worlds'. To this end, five core 'cultural conventions' have been located in the qualitative research findings which demonstrate the processes shaping museum visiting, namely: museums as 'activity spaces'; 'social interaction'; 'learning'; 'identity' and 'performance'.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In cultural geography concern has focused on the writing and reading of 'texts' (cf. Barnes and Duncan, 1992), where the meaning written into these texts (constructed by the 'author') is not necessarily the *same* meaning constructed in the reading (or 'reception') of them. I have argued that this 'tension' is an issue for museums and other heritage themed attractions, where curatorial attempts to 'write' the past may not necessarily be read (received) by visitors in the way the curators had intended. However, the heritage debate has paid limited attention to the writing and reading of museum 'texts'. Urry (1996) noted that little was known about how visitors used or responded to representations of the past. I suggested in Chapter 2 that heritage discourse is currently jaded and polarised, in need of moving forward. To this end, through a qualitative study, I have gathered empirical evidence to critically investigate the contours and complexities inherent in the production and consumption of heritage.

This current study has argued that museums and other heritage themed attractions are 'sites of representation' (Duncan, 1993) which make claims to portray the 'truth'. In considering the production of representations of other times I suggested three possible sources of truth: stones/built environment; oral history; and expert history. Each source of truth (or 'base to authenticity') is a representation of the past. Moreover, I explained how all three sources of truth were mediated, conditioned and contested and argued that they must all be viewed within the 'constructionist' theory of representation.

One dominant theme circulating heritage discourse was the notion that those drawn as consumers to heritage attractions were deemed gullible, passive victims: 'cultural dupes'. In this study, I put such claims of the mass culture critics to empirical test and found that evidence of 'duping' was highly fragmented and differentiated. Ultimately I rejected the mass culture thesis for being overly simplistic - I was unable to unpack the complexities of the producer/consumer relationship from this perspective. The 'pleasures of consumption' view is another traditional consumption theory that did find some resonance and relevance in this study as evidence of active, empowered visitors was visible in the qualitative data. However, this theory was also deemed too simplistic. In addition, recognising that meaning is constructed in the reading of museum 'texts' (meaning is produced in the experiencing), then visitors could also be viewed as 'producers'. To this end, given these processes and inter-relationships circulating museum environments, the producer/consumer labels seem inappropriate and problematic.

Applying Becker's (1982) model of the 'art world' to the study of the writing and reception of heritage provided a framework from which the complexities of museum visiting could be investigated through the identification of 'cultural conventions'. These conventions are seen as defining the art world and guiding the behaviour of participants therein. In addition, Becker's assertion that a performance and ritual based view of cultural activity was shaped by 'communicative events' also found resonance in this current study.

Observing the printing display, it was noted that the chain of 'communicative events' instigated by visitors on approaching the printing gallery area (for example, whether visitors expressed shyness or confidence), shaped the 'printing' performance (for instance, as to whether the demonstrator wore his '1930s' boss mask or not). Despite these differences in performance, it was equally clear that the 'ritual' (in terms of what visitors were told about the printing trade and the production of the printing certificate), remained constant. Hence, the variability of performance contrasted to the consistency of ritual: the process being influenced by visitors.

Five core cultural conventions were identified in the field study: social interaction, activity spaces, identity, learning and performance. Each of these conventions (outlined and examined in Chapter 6) play a crucial role in the shaping of museum visiting and in the construction of meaning in the experiencing of representations of the past.

The qualitative methods utilised in this study proved effective in accessing the voices of those who write and respond to representations of the past. In addition, a key strength of qualitative methods is their flexibility as they lend themselves to modification (as I outlined in Chapter 3 with regard to my attempts at participant observation).

It has been important to recognise the specific nature of the heritage sites studied in this thesis: their place on the 'heritage spectrum'. The Museum of Liverpool

Life, Quarry Bank Mill and Wigan Pier offer representations of recent history (within one or two generations) and as such relations between curators and visitors will be shaped by the influence of oral history and the authority of lived experience. Moreover, other heritage sites (in a similar position on the spectrum) will find common ground with many of the conventions identified above: for instance, opportunities for reminiscence within the process of social interaction; the performance and activity-based representations that characterise 'new' museums. Other heritage sites, located on different positions on the heritage spectrum may also replicate many of the 'conventions' listed. For example, visitors to Jorvik are equally presented with 'activity' based environments and performances, however, opportunities for reminiscing would be absent (limited?).

The qualitative research methods utilised in this current study and the application of Becker's 'art world' model open up the possibility of a plethora of further studies being undertaken which explore the different types of heritage sites located along the 'heritage spectrum'. These additional studies could build up a picture of the various 'cultural conventions' circulating different types of heritage attraction or museum. In this way, by extracting the cultural conventions common to all different types of heritage site would develop a broader understanding of the general dimensions shaping the experiencing of heritage. At the same time, these specific heritage typology studies, would illuminate the plurality of art worlds within the (more general) museum art world.

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Appendix I:
Heritage Sites Visited (August 1994)

Site	Themes Portrayed	Demonstrators / Role Players	Age of Site	Ownership of Site
Bradford Industrial Museum	wool textiles and mill life; ancillary textile industries; transport; social history; working horses; power; mill engineering.	demonstrations	more than 10 years	local authority: City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council - Arts, Museums and Libraries Division
Helmshore Textile Museum	Lancashire's textile industry	demonstrations; guided tours	more than 10 years	one building owned by Lancashire County Council; the other owned by Higher Mill Museum Trust and operated by Lancashire County Council
Quarry Bank Mill	development of Quarry Bank Mill; Greg family; history of cotton industry	demonstrators; guided tours; 'costumed' workers in the Apprentice House	more than 10 years	Independent Museum Trust - Quarry Bank Mill Trust Limited. Buildings leased from National Trust
Museum of Liverpool Life	Phase One: Making a Living; Mersey Culture; Demanding a Voice	re-enactments (drama played out for visitors to look at and participate in); demonstrations	between 1 and 5 years (May 1993)	National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside
Wigan Pier	coal mining; mining disasters; Victorian school room; Palace of Varieties; seaside	demonstrators; Wigan Pier Theatre Company	between 6 and 10 years	Wigan Metropolitan Borough Council

Appendix II: Pilot Visitor Survey

MUSEUM OF LIVERPOOL LIFE - VISITOR SURVEY

Hello, my name is Deborah Baldwin and I am a postgraduate research student from Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education. I am doing a survey for my research on what visitors think about heritage attractions. Have you got a few minutes to answer some questions about your visit to the Museum?

SECTION 1: **I'd first like to ask you a few questions about the background to today's visit to the Museum of Liverpool Life.**

1. Is this your first visit to the Museum of Liverpool Life? yes 1 (*go to Q3.*) no 2 (*go to Q2.*)

2. Around how many times would you say you have visited?
   1 - 4 ☐ 1 5 - 9 ☐ 2 more than 10 ☐ 3

3. Why did you decide to visit the Museum of Liverpool Life today? _____

4. How did you *first* find out about the Museum of Liverpool Life? _____

SECTION 2: **These next questions relate specifically to today's visit to the Museum of Liverpool Life.**

5. a. Before today's visit to the Museum of Liverpool Life, did you have any expectations about what you might see here?
   Yes 1 (*go to b.*) No 2 (*go to Q6.*)

   b. What were you expecting to see at the Museum of Liverpool Life?

   c. How well were your expectations met? **[show card A]** ☐

   Why do you say that? _____

6. a. Is there any display or exhibit in the Museum of Liverpool Life that you were not expecting to see? Yes 1 (*go to b.*) No 2 (*go to Q7.*)

   b. What was it? _____

c. What did you think of it?

d. Is there any topic, theme or event that you feel should be presented in the Museum of Liverpool Life, that has not been included?

7. a. What features of the Museum of Liverpool Life did you *like*?

b. Why did these features appeal to you?

8. At this stage of the Museum of Liverpool Life's development, the museum is divided into three themes: Making A Living, Demanding a Voice and Mersey Culture. **[show card B]**

a. Of these three themes: which appealed to you the most? 1, 2 or 3 ☐

b. In what way did it appeal to you? [prompt until exhausted]

9. a. The following statement is in promotional literature for the Museum of Liverpool Life **[show card C]**:

'through lively and imaginative displays, the museum will tell the story of Liverpool and its people and their contribution to national life.'

From your experience today, do you feel the Museum has been successful in meeting this aim? Yes 1 No 2

b. Why do you say that? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

10. From this list of words, **[show card D]** please choose four which describe today's visit to the Museum of Liverpool Life? For each word, explain why you have chosen it.

word ***explanation***

_____ _____

_____

_____ _____

_____

_____ _____

_____

_____ _____

_____

11. a. What features of the Museum of Liverpool Life could be improved?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

12. a. What would you say to someone who asks: 'is the Museum of Liverpool Life worth a visit?' _____

_____

_____

_____

b. Why do you say that? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

SECTION 3: I am now going to ask for your opinions about museums, history and heritage in general.

13. What do you understand by the term 'heritage'? _____

_____

_____

_____

14. What do you think is the role of museums in today's society?

_____

_____

_____

_____

15. What does 'the past' mean to you? _____

_____

_____

_____

16. How many people, yourself included, are in your party? ☐ (*if 1 go to Q19.*)
(*more than 1 go to Q17.*)

17. Who has come with you?

wife/husband/partner	☐ 1		school party ☐ 5
friend(s)	☐ 2		other party ☐ 6
family with children under 16	☐ 3	(*go to Q18*)	other, please state
family without children under 16	☐ 4		_____ 7

SECTION 4: Only applies to those who have visited the Museum of Liverpool Life with children under 16.

18. I am going to read out 5 statements, for each statement, I would like you to give me a score between 1 and 5, to show me how far you agree or disagree with it. 1 means that you strongly disagree and 5 means that you strongly agree [**show card E**]. So, how far do you agree or disagree that ...

a. The displays and exhibits in the Museum of Liverpool Life kept the children interested. ☐

b. The children found the Museum of Liverpool Life entertaining. ☐

c. From their experience of the Museum of Liverpool Life, the children have learned a great deal about Liverpool's history. ☐

d. The Museum of Liverpool Life has a strong educational value. ☐

e. The Museum of Liverpool Life is a fun-filled place for the children. ☐

SECTION 5: Finally, to help me interpret the findings of this survey, the following questions are about you, so...

19. To which age group do you belong [**show card F**] ☐

20. Are you usually resident...? [**show card G**] ☐

21. At what level did you finish your education [**show card H**] ☐

Record gender: male 1 female 2

Date: _____ time: a.m. ☐ p.m. ☐

Appendix III:

MUSEUM OF LIVERPOOL LIFE - VISITOR SURVEY

Hello, my name is Deborah Baldwin and I am a research student from Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education. I am doing a survey for my research on what visitors think about heritage attractions. It has been authorised by the Museum of Liverpool Life and the results will be made available to them. Have you got a few minutes to answer some questions about your visit to the Museum?

1. Why did you decide to visit the Museum of Liverpool Life today?

1) no reason - just passing	1	2) interested in subject	2	3) educational reasons	3
4) school/college trip	4	5) recommendation	5	6) promotion/advertisement	6
7) been before *(go to Q4)*	7	8) to get information	8	9) to see a specific exhibition	9

10) other, 10 _____

2. Is this your first visit to the Museum of Liverpool Life? Y 1 *(go to Q3)* N 2 *(go to Q4)*

3a. Before today's visit to the Museum of Liverpool Life, did you have any expectations about what you might see here? Y 1 *(go to b)* N 2 *(go to Q5)*

b. What were you expecting to see at the Museum of Liverpool Life? _____

_____

_____

_____

c. How well were your expectations met? **[show card A]** ☐

Why do you say that? _____

_____

_____

_____

4. Around how many times would you say you have visited? 1 - 4 ☐ 1 5 - 9 ☐ 2 more than 10 ☐ 3

5a. What features of the Museum of Liverpool Life did you ***like***? _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

b. Why did these features appeal to you? _____

_____

_____

6a. Is there any display or exhibit that surprised you by being included in the Museum of Liverpool Life? Y 1 *(go to b)* N 2 *(go to Q7)*

b. What was it? _____

_____

c. What did you think of it? _____

_____

7. Is there any topic, theme or event that you feel should be presented in the Museum of Liverpool Life, that has not been included? _____

_____

_____

_____

8a. At this stage of the Museum of Liverpool Life's development, the museum is divided into three themes: Making A Living, Demanding a Voice and Mersey Culture. Of these three themes: which appealed to you the most? 1, 2 or 3 ☐

b. In what way did it appeal to you? [prompt until exhausted] _____

_____

_____

_____

9a. This statement is found in promotional literature for the Museum of Liverpool Life **[show card B]**: **'through lively and imaginative displays, the museum will tell the story of Liverpool and its people and their contribution to national life.'**
From your experience today, **[show card C]** how successful has the Museum been at meeting this aim? ☐

b. Why do you say that? _____

_____

_____

_____

10. From this list of words, **[show card D]** please choose four which describe today's visit to the Museum of Liverpool Life? For each word, please explain why you have chosen it.

word ***explanation***

_____ _____

_____

_____ _____

_____

_____ _____

_____

_____ _____

_____

_____ _____

_____

11a. During your visit to the Museum of Liverpool Life, was the printer in his workshop?
Y 1 *(go to b)* N 2 *(go to d)* DK 3 *(go to d)*

b. Did you... **[show card E]**

1 Take part in a demonstration ☐ *(go to c)*
2 Talk to him ☐
3 Observe him demonstrating the trade with other visitors ☐
4 Did not stop ☐
5 Other (please state) _____

_____

c. What did you think about this experience? _____

_____

_____

d. What do you feel about the use of role players and demonstrators in museums as a method of presenting exhibits and displays? _____

12. What do you understand by the term 'heritage'? _____

13. What do you think is the role of museums in today's society? _____

14. What do you understand by the term 'authenticity'? _____

15a. What do you think is the role of a museum curator? _____

b. If you had the opportunity to ask or say anything to the curators responsible for the Museum of Liverpool Life, what would you say? _____

Finally, to help me interpret the findings of this survey, the following questions are about you...

16. How many people, yourself included, are in your party? ☐ ***(if 1 go to Q18)*** ***(more than 1 go to Q17)***

17. Who has come with you?

wife/husband/partner	☐ 1	school party	☐ 5
friend(s)	☐ 2	other party	☐ 6
family with children under 16	☐ 3	other, please state	
family without children under 16	☐ 4	_____	7

18. **[Show card F]** Age ☐

19. **[Show card G]** Resident...? ☐

20. **[Show card H]** Education ☐

Gender: m1 f 2

Date: _____ time: a.m. ☐ p.m. ☐ Thank you very much for your time. Have you any questions for me?

Appendix IV:

Printing Demonstrator, Museum of Liverpool Life, Interview Transcript (18/5/97)

Key: DB: Deborah Baldwin
PD: Printing Demonstrator

DB: 'Erm, what the, er general, general themes of the interview are ...[pause] is first of all to get an idea of the development of the Printer's Workshop Display, erm secondly to consider some aspects about working in the museum and then finally to consider some aspects of erm, the visitor experience and the interaction with the visitors. So that's the three areas that the questions are going to be targeted at...so, the first one, how did you come to work at National Museums and Galleries....?
PD: 'Now, erm, to be brutally frank, I was out of work and it was a job that... to elaborate on that the contract was three months and it was to quote 'sort out' unquote the printing collection which had remained collected but *dormant* for 12 years so there was a lot of sorting out to do and ... then worked as a volunteer for (sigh) about 12 months and then got taken on as a demonstrator and I just, just worked ever since as a demonstrator, a craft demonstrator...'
DB: 'So, how did the, the actual Printer's Workshop Display develop then, just from you sorting out the printing collection? Where did the idea come from?'
PD: 'I was first employed in the museum store...yes? ... [DB: 'Yes.'] ...and it came about because they decided to open this store to the public. Museum stores as a general rule are *not* open to the public except maybe once a year. The Science Museum opens theirs at Royton one day a year and it was, it was a take off of that idea, instead of just opening it for one day they opened erm for 13 Sunday afternoons and it was an absolute raging success and the idea of my being there was so that at the end of the day there was a *souvenir* people could take away with them...[DB: 'Right.'] ... something that they'd seen produced on an ancient printing machine...erm...and we, we just went from there... the thing generated erm ... *13000* people in about, I can't remember, it was 10 or 12 Sunday afternoons, then this idea of an *interactive* display erm which had been tried very successfully in America and they decided to do it over here...erm...and the printing machine we were using happen to put into working practice 4 or 5 of the experiments that we had in this display and erm so it was a good way of actually showing er a scientific experiment in a working ... a w-workshop, you know... [DB: 'Mmmm.'] ...actually being put to use and erm it just went on from there and moved over to the Maritime ... when that was closing down... that closed down 'cos they had to leave their premises and I, I came over here and it's just basically carried on from there. It's a souvenir for people to take away, hopefully while they are there they will have learned a little bit about printing, how it used to be and in a limited way about present day computerised printing because I'm not really top-shakes on computer printing... simply and solely because I am not active in it...and so I've only sort of got a broad ... erm theoretical knowledge of it...'
DB: 'Right... okay, erm, how much input did you have in the development of the display and how much was the curator...er... involved?'

PD: 'Er, now, basically the design of the place, what went into it was left to me... I was given an empty space, I was then given a series of *dates* that I could work to, sort of 1850s er...1930s...1950s...'

INTERRUPTION

PD: 'Erm, what was I saying... yeah, er I was told I was working in another part of the museum altogether erm, over by the piermaster's house, and I was told that they were building a space, gallery space, leaving gallery space for the printer's workshop er... in the event it turned out to be three metres by three metres which was about *half* of the space I had where I was working and I was told to basically turn it from an empty space into a printer's workshop...erm as I say I was given the option of, of what sort of date it was going to go into and we *chose* the machine we, we have on display because it's an *interactive* display and it's *safe* to use. No other criteria other than it is safe to use. We *know* it's way out of date for the date we are actually supposed to be setting erm ... but safety overrides that criteria... the date, so we have an eighteen-hundred machine and erm basically that was it. I worked out how much space I had, each piece was going to take up and just jiggled about with it and got a plan to scale and cut pieces of cardboard out to scale and I just moved them around until I was happy or whatever... [DB: 'Mmmm.'] ... and I did, and just told them exactly what I wanted and put it in myself. And then as regards the cupboards and the shelves, erm 99% of that is just stage-dressing... [DB: 'Mmmm.'] It's just there to make it look authentic. A lot of the ink cans for example are empty or that old that the ink has dried up and is totally useless so it's just stage-dressing. A lot of the stuff in the cupboards again is just stage-dressing... It's just to make them *look real*.'

DB: 'So the cupboards are not from the same period as the printer?'

PD: 'Well, it's designed to look like that... I mean a lot of it *isn't* 1930s and simply because you just can't get hold of it, erm, most of it is like, printed ephemera and printed ephemera was basically thrown onto the fire and so is very, very difficult to get hold of ... so it's just disguised to look like... *Fortunately* when people look at the cupboard, they only look at a cupboard and see books and very rarely pursue it any further than that. Nobody as yet has gone up and said: " Oh that's from nineteen-ninety-whatever.'

DB: 'Mmmm. And, regards the video as well?'

PD: 'Erm, the video, the first part erm was actually done by, by the guy's family. It was a private video that they shot. The second part erm, I asked the questions, but asked them in such a way so as they don't, what the various people say don't appear like answers they appear like a commentary or that they are talking about printing or their bit of printing ... erm, and that was, that was the whole idea of it, so that when it went on tape it looked as though they were just talking impromptu erm, the questions were edited out of it. Erm, the only thing on the first clip was that I told them what was going on and they put the printed captions on it.'

DB: 'Mmmm. And were the curators generally happy with the idea, with the ideas you'd come up with ... or did you have to change anything?'

PD: 'Erm, yeah. The only problems I had was with what I could actually stick on the walls erm... some stuff they knocked back because they said that it wouldn't have been erm available at the time.... I mean other stuff such as erm anything about the Titanic for example, was still erm too much of a sore spot to have that hanging up ... Titanic or the Lusitania because we are only talking what, erm ... 20 years since the Titanic had gone down, a bit more than 20 years, and about the same for the Lusitania because there was only three years between them something like that ... so when anything to do with that ... So what is up on the walls is as near as possible err ... 1930s stuff or *pre*-1930s erm (sigh) ... I would like actually to put some different posters up but I am going to have to seek guidance from curatorial staff.'

DB: 'Erm, in terms of the Printer's Workshop Display... has it any particular significance to Liverpool or do you think it could be in a museum [PD: 'No.'] ... anywhere?'
PD: 'It's *a general workshop from anywhere.* It's a small printer's from anywhere in the country and by the country I mean the whole of the British Isles ... anywhere in the British Isles ... er the only criticism erm is that it's not scruffy enough. It's not dirty enough ... [DB: 'Right.'] ... because as a general rule of thumb, small printers were *terribly scruffy* little places er...'
DB: 'Was that a criticism, *your* criticism or is it something say a visitor has said...?'
PD: 'It's, it's something that *I know* and that other printers have pointed out ... the *reason* it is like that, is purely for security. If it was as scruffy as it should be, things could go missing, items could go missing and you'd never notice. The way it is now, it's scruffy, in quotes, but it's scruffy in such a way if something went missing you'd be able to pick up on it straight away or I would ... er which is another prime concern because there is theft.'
DB: 'Theft... mmmm ... okay, erm, how long did you say you'd been a demonstrator ...about?'
PD: 'Oh.... (sigh) since 1986....'
DB: '1986...right. What did it feel like when you first started erm interacting with the public?'
PD: 'Erm, frightening. Still does occasionally because I'm basically a shy person although it might not come across as that. There is a lot of front... erm.... (sigh) I also suffer from stage fright erm, so really I'm the last person in the world who should be doing this job. The other thing of course is that it is the *total opposite* to to a compositor's life. A compositor's life was to go in erm, and get your head down and work, don't look round and *certainly* don't talk and if you were caught talking you got a rollicking erm unless you had good reason. So this is the total opposite. Erm, I was quite surprised, once I had managed to sort of, contain this, this, stage-fright and shyness, erm that I think I've become *reasonably* good at what I do. Erm I've been on a couple of courses for erm, public speaking and I found that helps so, sort of on-the-job training, but very basically at the beginning we were breaking ground that nobody had broken in this country. There wasn't even a book to pick up and read on it. Erm, about the best we got was erm, (sigh) .... very, very basic about dealing with erm, disabled people and in particular it was on deaf people, not to make assumptions that because deaf people are deaf, they are not necessarily *totally* deaf, there are shades of deafness... same as ... there are shades of blindness. Another thing was with blind people, *never* to assume because blind people see by touch that they are necessarily gentle when they touch. [DB: Mmm.] It's very often that they will *grasp* tight hold, erm, and it was, there was just a little bit how teachers sort of talk, talk to people. Erm, sometimes it works, *sometimes* the last thing you need to sound like is a teacher, erm, basically you need to be yourself, keep it joky, whatever.'
DB: 'Mmmm. Right, okay, erm one of the things I noticed when I observed, the past few days that I sat in, erm is the hesitancy of some visitors when they see you. How do you reel them in? What strategies do you employ to draw them in and get them to talk to you?'
PD: 'Erm, basically by being cheeky, being bold and going out and literally grabbing them, well not literally grabbing them but verbally grabbing them. Sometimes I almost feel like I'm bullying people, but a lot of people erm actually seem to like

being *ordered* or told what to do [DB: Mmm] ... erm ... I don't know, it, it's something I've... I've.... [pause] never really questioned. I sometimes get these feelings, that I'm bullying people but I've never really dwelt on it, 'cos if I did I might not do it and it might make me less successful. I *don't know.* I've never actually asked people "did they feel threatened or bullied?" ...erm, but I try to make it almost a humorous, erm, couple of minutes ... I, I hope they will take away that I'm not, and at the end of the day, *not* feel threatened ... certainly, with young children 3, 4, 5 years I know they don't feel threatened because erm you can, I've actually turned a child from not wanting to come up into the area, to wanting to do it and *coming* back, making repeat visits, so erm, you can't always use those same tactics *as you can* with an adult ... because they'd think you were talking down to them...'

DB: 'Okay, erm, is the job satisfying?'

PD: 'Sometimes yeah, yeah... [DB: 'In what ways?'] ... It's quite good to get somebody that has never done printing before to turn out what *I* consider, as a professional printer, erm ... is a commercially viable print. In other words, if I ask them to pay 50p for it, they would part with 50p for it [DB: 'Mmm] ... There is, there is a deal of satisfaction in that. Okay, I know, that, erm I would place the sheet onto the form and in its printing position. You could say that. I do that basically because it's quicker for me to do it. [DB: 'Mmm']. But there is no reason why the average person couldn't do it themselves once they'd been told where exactly you've got to lay it to... [DB: 'Right.'] ..and *that* is the satisfaction. Erm, it's quite nice to receive letters, from, from the public, erm at least then you know you are doing your job right then.'

DB: 'Right, okay, erm, this next question leads on from what you said ... You remarked once when I was stood talking to you that sometimes it 'feels like a production line' and that you are not really doing your job...erm, when and how do you feel like you are *really* doing your job? I think this was more to do with when a lot of children were coming in and you were just [PD: 'Yes.' (sigh)] churning them out.'

PD: 'When, when, you... it becomes a production line, when you are conscious of the parents or the adults are *moaning* about the time it's taking. So you are trying to *push* the kids through. Er, basically to keep everybody happy, but, at the end of the day, no I'm not doing my job because I'm not explaining anything or *very little* er, because you are just pushing the kids through and I suppose when you feel satisfied is when you can actually stop and maybe spend quarter of an hour, half an hour even *talking* to somebody about printing, about the way it was ... erm about the way erm, even why printing actually came to *take off* in Europe because printing took off in Europe in, what, the fourteen hundreds ... its been around since round about 200, 400 AD but in the Far East ... it never in the Far East ... [DB: 'Right.'] ... er so just, just to explain it to people because most people *accept* printing for what it is and never look any further, they never think well why was printing so successful in Europe when in wasn't successful in China? Well you know the Chinese, invented it ... but very near a thousand *years* before we were ready for it, ... but erm it's quite nice to actually get people thinking ... erm to tell them bits about printing because printing was always *a closed shop* and I *don't* necessarily mean like in the way that erm it was *unionised,* I mean that it was more like a secret society *what* happened in printing was *known only to printers.* It was never known by the general public. The *general* public have learned more about printing in the last 20 years than in the last... 500 years [DB: 'Mmmm.'] ... because it's, it's opened up, because printing as I as I

knew it as I started is, is basically gone it's a computer science and it's only now that people are beginning to talk about what printing used to be like.'
INTERRUPTION
DB: 'Erm, the last sort of question which was relating to the general aspects of working in Liverpool Life but it's sort of meandering towards visitors ...they're all sort of inter-linked. Do you think it lends weight, or authenticity to the visitor's experience if they know that you used to be a printer? Does that come through a lot?'
PD: 'Erm, people do ask me whether I've been a printer, yeah, I've never really thought about it to be honest with you... [DB: 'No.'] ... I don't, don't honestly know, I, I *assume*, and I know it's wrong and I shouldn't assume that people *know* that I'm a printer [DB: 'Right.'] ... er, but I've never really questioned it as such. [DB: 'Mmm.'] erm, ...people, people *do* say you know, wer, were you a printer or a ... I, I'll say 'Yeah' you know, that I am a printer and not a museum person as such. The other thing is a lot of people think I've *retired* [DB: 'Right.'] ...do it as part-time, ... don't know, it's a good job I'm not vain, I might get worried otherwise [laughter]'
DB: 'Erm, one of the things that I noticed while I was observing you was you seem to be, now I called it a 'surrogate curator' because the visitors seemed to think you have erm, a local or general knowledge of history erm, do you feel that you have this role or is that just something I observed?'
PD: It's a role that is thrust upon you because you are *there*. If you work in a museum you must be the source of *all* knowledge erm, erm and, and in point of fact, the Maritime Museum built up this reputation that anybody that was in the public domain i.e. whether they be shop assistants, or erm information assistants, attendant erm, role player, would know quite a lot more than the average front line person in a museum would and not only knew a lot more but were *encouraged* to talk to the visitors, it was a definite policy that they, I mean attendants for example were given a script that they had to learn and this related to every part of the museum erm a lot of people then, I mean once your curiosity is piqued will go on and learn more about the subject a lot of them already *knew* about the subject [DB: 'Mmm.'] ... so used their own knowledge but certain, employers were always encouraged *to talk* to the public ... a lot of other places you go ... to attendants, security are, trained *not* to talk to the public. They are there *just* as guardians .... [DB: 'Mmmm.'] and but this, this was *radical* approach, as far as I know at the time and erm *seemed* to pay off dividends because it did actually become quite noteworthy that people were *friendly* if you like ...'
DB: 'Do you prefer this approach?'
PD: 'Sometimes, yes ... other times it can get in the way of you doing your job erm ... I mean I know I can probably talk about most things in this museum ... *grazing* over the surface, but I can't go into the *depths* of it because I *don't* know about the *depths* of it ... unless it is something I've experienced in my life ... I mean if it was something about a strike then I could talk about a strike because I've been involved in a strike, when people start asking me questions about, about a fellow was asking about printing, and then I answered his questions and he went off to another part and *then* came back and started asking questions about, and I just did not know the answer to ... it's not part of the printing and erm it was far too deep, far deeper than anything I'd ever gone into, erm, so I just couldn't answer and told him I didn't know, and he wasn't satisfied with that, he still persisted erm, in the end it actually

took another visitor to say "er, excuse me can my children have a go at this .... we are waiting here" and he was quite rude to the guy, he cut across the guy and spoke to me [DB: 'Right.']... but this, this knocked the guy off his stride and he went away (cough) so sometimes it does get in the way of my job.'

DB: 'Right, erm, in terms of the printing display what are the dominant themes or topics that visitors discuss about printing?'

PD: 'Erm, (sigh) I don't think there is a dominant one, the, the most dominant remark is either how *slow* it is obviously when you compare it to printing today, [DB: 'Mmm.'] or, when they realise, what, what the Victorians, were supposed to produce, how *hard* it was, how much *graft* they had to put into a day's work ... but I don't know, I'm actually supposed to write a list out of these questions to be honest with you I've never got round to doing it because I honestly feel that it would take too much time to stop and write each question and unfortunately I've got a memory like a sieve ... erm, and I, I forget ...'

DB: 'I mean I ask that just, whether the ones I'd noticed, whether they were the ones you'd picked up on ... the wages and the notion of the deskilling of printing ... [unclear] ... from my notes, that people tend to pick up on ...'

PD: 'Yeah, yeah it could be ... as I say I always suggest that deskilling is something that is going on right the way across industry and as regards wages erm wages in point of fact now bear no relation to what they did in Victorian times, Victorian printers far, far better off than printers today. Printers today would have to be on in excess of £400 a week to be on the same scale as Victorian was.'

DB: 'Right, okay, would you say that the display is very selective in terms of showing a particular aspect of the printing industry in the 1930s?'

PD: '(sigh)Yes, but the biggest limitation about showing anything there is the *space* that was available erm and ... so we could actually do with four times the space that [unclear]... as it is at the moment I wouldn't even say that it was representative of a small printers, it's too small even for that it needs to be *at least twice* the size. It needs three or four times the amount of type that we've got even for a realistic small printers ... erm the machine of the 1930s would be erm a power machine (cough) even quite a small printers would erm probably have a line shaft, if he didn't have a line shaft it would probably have been a treadle operating machine erm so no as I say the main concern about the actual machine side is the safety aspect [DB: 'Yes.'] ... even, even, with a treadle machine, that is treadle operated, it is far too dangerous to have it where people could get their fingers in it because when the jaws of a treadle operated machine close there is enough room for a piece of paper so it makes a bit of a mess of your fingers if ... [unclear] ... That is the only criteria about machines is the safety of the machine. We *know* that it is totally out of date machine, *way* out of date, in fact small firms erm, had machines that were running off electric motors with, erm ... compressed air suckers to lift the paper up to feed them to mechanical grippers for printing by 1905, so this machine is *hopelessly* out of date and really does, says nothing about printing in the 1930s. It's a museum *gallery* and as such all you can do, in this space anyway, is *show* a little bit of what it would have been like, hopefully we can get a little bit of working practice over from my personal knowledge, but apart from that no, I honestly think it looks nothing like a printers.'

DB: 'Do you think visitors are aware of that?'

PD: 'No. Not unless they've been in print ... erm it goes back again to what I was saying before about printing being erm a *totally* closed environment. Erm, I mean my wife knows that I'm a printer, for example, my wife knows that I'm a printer but

she's not 100% sure what my job is ... even when I was working in printing erm and because it wasn't something, you just didn't explain it to people outside. It was *your* job, (sigh) and if you went out socially you, you don't tend to talk about your job you know, you talk about football, politics, women, whatever, but you don't talk about work. Work is something you do five days a week, it doesn't interfere with your leisure time erm...'

DB: 'Do you think the visitors believe everything you tell them? ...[PD: 'No.'] ...No? Have they ever queried or challenged anything you have said to them?'

PD: 'Erm, yeah. A lot of them challenge my signature everyday. [laughter] And I would expect them to. [laughter] No I ... even, even children will look sideways at you when, when I'm sort of going through my 1930s bosses mode. You can almost hear them saying "Oh yeah?" [laughter] erm, so no ....if I think I'm going over the top and people are believing me. Unless I'm telling them the absolute truth. But if I'm acting the goat, erm ... which is basically what I tend to think of what I'm doing when I'm in the 1930s mode which is acting the fool. I think it's the only way that I *can* actually *do it*. I can't be serious about being a 1930s person ... I'm not an actor, I've no actor's training and I do have stage fright. So the only, I do honestly feel as though I'm acting the fool when I'm doing that and I *know* I'm acting the fool, erm *I* would hope that enough of that comes across so that people can see straight away that I am only acting the goat erm, whether, whether it does, I don't know, it's just something that I hope and I *assume* that they will see that. But when I'm actually giving them *facts* then, *no* I *do* want them to believe me because if its facts then it's *true* and it's something I've researched and I know is true no matter how strange it seems like ...'

END OF SIDE ONE

DB: 'Erm, have you ever learned anything about printing from the visitors or any ex-printers?'

PD: 'Oh *yes*, you never stop *learning* ... in *any* job I mean erm (sigh) learning is very often *re*-learning something simple and basic that you had forgotten about, something that maybe, you haven't done for 20 years and somebody'll mention it and it comes back. Well I class that as learning erm, obviously I wasn't around in the 1930s, erm so what, I'm doing is, is erm building, this, this character of *my* time in printing which was the 1950s, and assuming it wasn't *that* different, that working practices didn't change that much over 20 years obviously it must have changed, erm because we had the Second World War and that changed things quite a lot. But a lot of the *attitudes* were certainly the same after the war as *before* the war. It wasn't until erm the 1960s that attitudes started changing. When I first went into printing erm, you were told you were the cream of the working class and the people who were telling you *believed* it and if somebody tells you something and impresses something on you when you are young and *they* believe it, *you* tend to believe it [DB: 'Mmmm.'] erm, it was only in the Sixties when there seemed to be a great levelling off erm ... how can I, how can I put it? Erm, ... up until the 1960s it was quite okay to go to work and get your hands dirty ... when the 1960s and the 1970s came in we seemed to turn away from being a nation of producers erm, in the sense of actually producing goods to erm a nation that was producing *services* i.e. banking and money and tourism and stuff like that .... and .... so it then you became if you got your hands dirty, a quote 'dirty little worker' unquote I mean even today people tend and *if you* ask people they will tend to agree with you, yeah, it's not nice to get your hands dirty for your

living now ... [DB: 'Mmmm.'] people don't want to do it erm ... it's just attitudes have changed, social attitudes, working practices etc.'
DB: 'Have visitors ever offered you anything towards the printing display? [PD: 'Yes.'] ...Like what?'
PD: 'Oh, (sigh) machinery, erm, different bits of printing equipment erm ... cases of type, bits of machines erm, books, printing plates.'
DB: 'Have you ever kept it, have you ever said 'yes we'll take it? [PD: 'Oh yeah.'] ...Yeah?'
PD: 'Yeah ... it's erm ... but unfortunately, they've brought in this rule now, an absolute rule that it's *got* to be, for the museum to accept it now *and* display it, it's got to have either been *made* on Merseyside or *used* on Merseyside and they won't accept anything from *outside* Merseyside and as something like two thirds of our visitors are from *outside* Merseyside .... it cuts down what we can take ... but yes, there's quite a lot of stuff I've got, erm pieces of equipment ...'
DB: 'Erm, the, I don't know exactly what the technical term for the sign that's at the front of the display, that tells you all about the printing trade ...'
PD: 'That's a plinth.'
DB: 'Is that what it is?' [laughter]
PD: 'So I believe. That's what I call it anyway.' (cough)
DB: 'Erm, do you think it gets misinterpreted?'
PD: 'Yes ... and erm, the biggest mistake that people made is by thinking that *seven year olds* were taken on as apprentices ... [DB: 'Right.'] ... when it says it's 'seven years he serves his time for' ... [DB: 'Right.'] ... that's the biggest mistake ... [DB: 'Any others?'] ... er, ... the other one I suppose is people pick up on erm the fact that the machine is flat, the Albion we use and erm and they stick that alongside a photocopier because it mentions photocopiers on there ... what I tend to do then, is just point out that the photocopier works on *light* and is basically *reproducing a photograph*, but the photocopier won't work without a copy of a printed sheet. It *needs* an original to make a copy.'
DB: 'Mmm, ... yeah, that was the one I was thinking of ... you seem to have to correct [PD: 'Yeah.'] ... Who wrote that?'
PD: 'I honestly don't know ... it was one of the curators who was in charge of the gallery.'
DB: 'Mmm ...okay, erm, what do you feel that the visitors get out of the printing workshop display?'

PD: 'Hopefully a bit of knowledge, erm a bit of enjoyment, erm and a souvenir to go home with. *What* the museum gets out of it is hopefully return visits and customers who who's hopefully curiosity has been piqued enough to go on and do a bit of research on their own but if not a return visit .... [DB: 'Mmmm.'] of either them or their friends so ... and with the certificate, free publicity, 'cos every time they show that certificate to somebody they are publicising this museum ...'
DB: 'Yes... do you think their experiences vary by age or occupation or anything?'
PD: 'Obviously a seven year old is going to take away something different to an adult ... by that, yes, by age ... obviously erm but sort of by erm ... I don't know ... people, class shall we say ... you know, middle class seem to take away the same as the working class, erm ... (sigh) I can't even say that *one* listens more than the other er *most* people, most *adults* when they come erm are satisfied *if* their children are satisfied [DB: 'Right.'] you know, if, if the kids have been kept quiet for five minutes

that's great, it doesn't matter if, it's middle class or working class I *tend* to find that the middle class erm, think more about what their children learn and will encourage the children to listen and learn, whereas very often the working class as you could call it, quite often is his grandma. Grandmas are, are ... (sigh) totally different in their outlook to their grandchildren, parents, erm they, they just ... for a kick off they don't want to feel that another child is getting something their grandchild isn't ... so theirs have got to have it and learning something is almost *secondary*. I think it's more to do with the fact that grandmas and grandpas are about having fun and erm learning is more a parents job [DB: 'Right.'] although obviously grandparents *do* teach a lot, it's a lot more *subtle* than parents you know. Parents it's sort of wham-bam-thank-you-mam ... you *will* learn this, get your head down. Grandparents can afford to take their time and are much more er easy about things... much more laid back so it's, it's a totally different learning experience ...'

DB: 'Okay. The final few points really. Erm regarding your display and any general changes within NMGM. Erm, do you think erm, the printing display is going to be a permanent fixture in the museum?'

PD: 'So far as I'm aware, yes... [DB: 'Yes.'] I honestly can't answer more than that. I don't know. *Nobody* confides in me. [DB: 'No?'] I'm in a bit of an invidious position in as much as I work for, for Education, but all the equipment belongs to Regional History ... [DB: 'Right.'] ... and er no, I get to know very little about what's going on. Sometimes it is almost by accident I find out.... like I mean for example the girl that came in ... I only found out yesterday that she was going to be rehearsing today and I assumed well I was hoping she'd go over there to do it like (cough) so, no so I *honestly* don't know what is in their mind. I'm hoping it'll go on for the next nine years ... in nine years time I'll be retired. [DB: 'Right.'] At the end of the day this is how I earn my bread and butter so yeah, I want it to go on, whether it will I honestly don't know [DB: 'Mmmm.'] nobody bothers to consult.... it's the *lack* of communication which I'm afraid the museum is just notorious for everybody knows about it right from an attendant ... literally up to the director of NMGM, but nobody seems to be able to do anything about it. It will get better for a bit ... then it just goes back to how it was. It's not even caused by deliberate buck passing ... I don't know, I don't know what it is but our communication is just pathetic.

DB: 'My final two questions ... do you think visitors see you as a demonstrator, an ex-printer or an actor, or something else ...?'

PD: 'I don't know. I think they see me as a demonstrator, I think. But a lot of them take me to be a printer, a *working* printer not a demonstrating printer ... those that mention it I suppose it's about fifty-fifty. The rest just don't seem to make any comment. They just *accept* that you are there I mean a lot of people take me for a dummy ... literally, and when I move I frighten them [laughter] [DB: 'Really?'] ... Oh yeah ... I mean you know it's 'be still my beating heart' with some people [laughter] ... it's really frightened them [DB: 'because they are so used to wax works?'] well you see if I'm doing something I might be doing something where I've got to be still. The only part I'm moving is my fingers, so my head and body is not moving you know, you've *really* got to focus in to see somebody's fingers moving from I don't know, ten or fifteen foot away and if you suddenly start moving round and look. Because people *expect* to see dummies on displays not working, not live people [DB: 'No.'] ... erm ... we use to get it a lot with the role players in the down in the Emigration exhibit ... there have been lots of near heart attacks down there ...

[laughter] so about the most common one 'God I thought you were a dummy!' [laughter] to which I say no I'm [unclear] [laughter]'
DB: 'Erm, what would you like to see the visitors leave with? You've probably mentioned some things already.
PD: 'Yeah, just ...erm I would like every visitor to leave all fired up about the history of printing so they're all eager to find out ... 'cos I ... just as a person, not a printer I find it utterly *fascinating* and I would love to have the (sigh) I suppose the time and the ability if you like to write a book about it, but I'd always be worried that I'd be getting into plagiarism because I might be using other people's words... but I just find the history of printing to be *totally* ... fascinates me really, really enthralled ... there's *so* much happened, you know and ... I just, just hope that they will go away with ... I hope that a little of my enthusiasm rubs off on them and they won't just take it and forget about it they will follow it up ... erm, whether it happens I don't know ... it's just what I would hope that's it [unclear] The other thing of course is they learn ... even if they don't go away with the enthusiasm, they've learnt a little bit that printing has evolved like everything else in life over a period of 500 years we've gone from a man with a quill to computers and that's all it's taken *500* years... to go from something that was done by hand ... to something that is now done totally by machine. I mean the ... our input into it but erm, the amount of input, compared to what the guy with the quill inputted is, is nothing. Even to what the early printers put into their job ... even printers of my generation what we had to put into it, is nothing now, it's all computerised and I try not to sound bitter ... because it is just part of the evolution of, of life ... but a lot of people are very bitter and I'm trying to take that bitterness away by explaining that it is just *evolution*, that's all ... erm, any, any job, that hasn't changed in 500 years sooner or later science is going to catch up and change, and the longer it's been the bigger the change is going to be ... which was proved .... what, if Caxton had come back up to 20 years ago, he could have slotted in and set type up, erm, and basically wouldn't have been surprised ... the machinery side would have blown his mind er, the mechanical typesetting would have blown his mind but he could have gone and set type ... *that* hadn't changed *at all* and computers came in .... whoosh, it's gone. I suppose erm, the biggest surprise wasn't the computers coming in, *we knew* they were coming in it was the *speed* took over and just decimated the trade ... I suppose that was the real, a shock ... but as I say it's just part of evolution... that's all it was something that was *bound* to happen one day. And as sure as eggs is eggs ...'
DB: 'Right that's all my questions. Thank you very much.
PD: 'Well I hope it's been of some use.'

END OF INTERVIEW

Appendix V:
Notice placed in the Education Bulletin

TO ALL TEACHERS PLANNING FIELDTRIPS TO THE ALBERT DOCK, LIVERPOOL (SEPTEMBER TO DECEMBER 1995)

I am a 2nd year PhD student conducting research into visitor perceptions of heritage, using the Albert Dock as a case study site. I am looking for any teachers who would be willing to allow me to use their class (any ages) in my research - this would involve talking to the children at school prior to the visit, observing them on their visit, and then conducting follow-up interviews with the children back at school. The outcomes of my research will include: an assessment of what children obtain from visits to museums / heritage themed sites; a report produced from the research findings which will illustrate how the fieldtrips to the Albert Dock site are received and interpreted by children. If you would like to help me, or would like further details about my research, contact **Deborah Baldwin, Postgraduate Research Student, Department of Geography and Geology, Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education, Francis Close Hall, Swindon Road, Cheltenham, Glos. GL50 4AZ.** Many thanks for your time. I look forward to hearing from you.

APPENDIX VI:

Field notes of the 'feedback' session on the focus groups conducted by the Susie Fisher Group, held 21.1.99 in the Education Room, MLL.

Present: a variety of NMGM personnel, including Simon Jones (MLL Curator), Anne Pennington (NMGM Research Officer), Janet Dugdale (MLL Curator), Graham Boxer (Head of Regional History, MLL/NMGM) and Susie Fisher (Market Research Consultant, focus group co-ordinator).

Focus groups - testing background knowledge and understanding of 'community'. Considering whether this understanding reflected the city's 'cultural diversity' and if it raised any difficult issues.

Broad themes: didn't see the concepts/structure the same way as the curators.

[NB: two groups held - one older group/non-family; one family group. Also, members chosen for their cultural diversity, therefore included participants who were Irish, Jewish, Chinese, Black, Asian]

'Community': groups had no difficulty talking about what it means - although the 'word/title' seen as quite abstract.

A multifaceted community
I. common roots
II. common interests

- hence a questioning of the 'physical' associations of community

Community - consisting of people whose paths cross, who they talk to, gatherings, meetings and being together.

Older group - sympathy - look to the past, reminisce - community being broken up and people moving out
Younger group - fracturing

Lack of identification with the 'twee' rosy image.

Communities going - time of year? - garden fence?

Process of establishing a community - a mysterious process. Group members, not used to thing about this - has not been analysed no framework (homes/their background but not community). Hence - opportunities for curators: to pose questions, alert people's interest, as well as giving them facts.

Group felt they 'belonged' in various ways: postcode, nationality, religion, ethnic roots, neighbourhood, landmark, city, my workplace [different perspective -- where paths cross], school.

Were people 'feel comfortable' - seek help, shop, meet, drink etc.

Arranging to meet - seen as a positive act.

Belonging - where people are not alone, issue of comfort and co-operation.

Structure (of the focus group session -themes to explore): introduce idea of Liverpool, creating a city, a place to live, express belief, belonging and identity, building communities, hand-son history.

Argues that people think in (cyclical) stages

1. Process of settling - objective - to get on their feet (become established); clinging on to their identity (portable, carry with them); member of an alien group (ethnic background)

Issues of motivation (heroic); lack of choice; being flung into support groups
Sense that Liverpool was an open place.

[this wasn't expected by curators]

2. Getting a home
Here, person's identity begins to come through. Personal, interior, my identity on my walls, use of religious artefacts (roots/identity), decorate. Putting up curtains - issue of privacy - here, this is not about community, a reaction against this - find something personal.

[recognising community - difficult to do this - conceptually]

3. Feeling part of several communities

Neighbourhoods

Workplace: meeting people, common interests, what people talk about. [loss? choice? also perhaps a response to changing external reality]

4. Mobilising - bonding together, recognising threats (e.g. war, injustice) - common interest. Systems (e.g. banks - have whip rounds to avoid moneylenders). Recreate the need for a co-operative. Don't know what you've lost until it's gone. Push and pull factors.
Lack of choice in the past of where to move to.

Role of car/different lifestyles - hindered community development - yet still formed different communities based on common interest.

Housing design: for needs?

Is it people or place which contribute to identity of Liverpool - both? [no time for this question]

What is people / place?

People's stories that are of interest (rather than a place). Motives for coming (why?) [is it like my family experience or links to other families]

Stories of ethnic groups - issues of separation [recognise individual groups] or integrate [all Liverpool?].

What do they consider Liverpool's identity?
Humour, tolerant, friendly, diverse, hardship, multicultural, dump, decline, depressed.
One the physical side, they had little to say - only that it was a sea port - no mention of cathedrals etc.]

Wanted to see how people lived (their ways of life) - captured in a hands-n section. Objects in people's homes (not community).

Proud of Liverpool's cultural diversity - yet can't think of many example to express this . Chinese New Year. Not very good a what elements brought into the melting pot - something worth exploring. What are they proud of? Question of stereotyping? Yet, such comments made by those people (e.g. Irish pubs, black fun).

Question of addressing a plurality of perspectives.

Division: curators - offer a celebratory vision which needs the counterbalance (dark side) tackling issues of education and racism. Groups: wanted 'facts': what happened - honesty. Address how people got out of these situations.

SF - argued , all the above - been theoretical interpretation of the group discussions. Moved on to consider these comments in light of their implications for the gallery constructions.

Argues that at the moment - curatorial ideas - too segmented and too complicated.

1. People - finding a place to live
Essential identity - community (communities)/personal identity - represent internal struggle and conflict. Question relevance of past to present
Village identity - e.g. L1; Granby Street (Toxteth?)
Built environment - much harder to be expressed or identify with -- [what does this mean for a sense of place?] - needs to be brought out of them.
Question whether you are tied to a locality - and is this a community?

Post codes?

2. Creating the city
Changing population/development of language and identity - seen as dull
'Scouse' - viewed as something to be ashamed of - very touchy

Consider the history of black, Chinese, Irish etc. communities.

Sensitive issues - develop? trying to provoke a reaction?

3. Building a community

Housing - recent - (boring)

Commercial activity

The neighbourhood (street life)/ street parties - locality

Schools - reaching out - meeting place

Doctors surgery

Community action - do it yourself

Argues: if you talk about the architecture of the youth club (for example) you will not get the same emotional response -- buildings: the bricks and mortar do not mean anything.

4. Belonging

5. Celebrating culture - high point as something everyone can enjoy, then move to racism section - need the counterbalance

What is it [the gallery] about - could express this and did not like curatorial suggestions for the name - Homes and Community/ Liverpudlians All - preferred something like The People and The Place

Didn't want a snappy name - needed something to reflect the emotional pull.

Tell story as it is but be positive

Argues that want to get them to engage with the displays, perhaps have to play the nostalgia card to get them interested.

Appendix VII:
Printing Survey

MUSEUM OF LIVERPOOL LIFE - 'PRINTER' SURVEY

Hello, my name is Deborah Baldwin. I am a student conducting a research project on what visitors think about heritage attractions. Could I please ask you a couple of questions about what you think about the printer's workshop display?

1. Did you...
   take part in a demonstration ☐ (go to 2)
   talk to him ☐
   observe him demonstrating the trade with other visitors ☐
   other (please state) _____
   _____

2. What did you think of this experience? _____
   _____

3. Would you have liked to have seen the printing industry presented in any other way? (circle) Y N DK O Why do you say this?_____
   _____
   _____

4. Do you think you got anything out of this experience? (circle) Y N DK O
   Why do you say this? _____
   _____
   _____

5. What do you feel about the use of role players and demonstrators in museums as a method of presenting exhibits and displays? _____
   _____
   _____

6. Have you come across this type of presentation in other heritage attractions? (circle)Y N DK O
   Where? _____
   Did you get involved in any way? (circle) Y N DK O
   What did you think of that experience? _____
   _____
   _____
   How does it (they) compare to today's experience with the printer's workshop display? _____
   _____

Finally to help me interpret the findings of this survey, the following questions are about you ...

7.	Age	☐	8.	Resident...?	☐
9.	Education	☐	10.	Gender	m f

Date: _____ time: am ☐ pm ☐
Thank you very much for your time. Have you any questions for me?